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OUR OLD
UNCLE'S HOME.





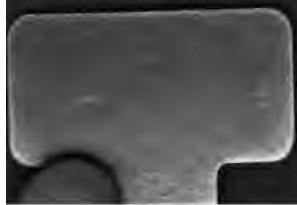
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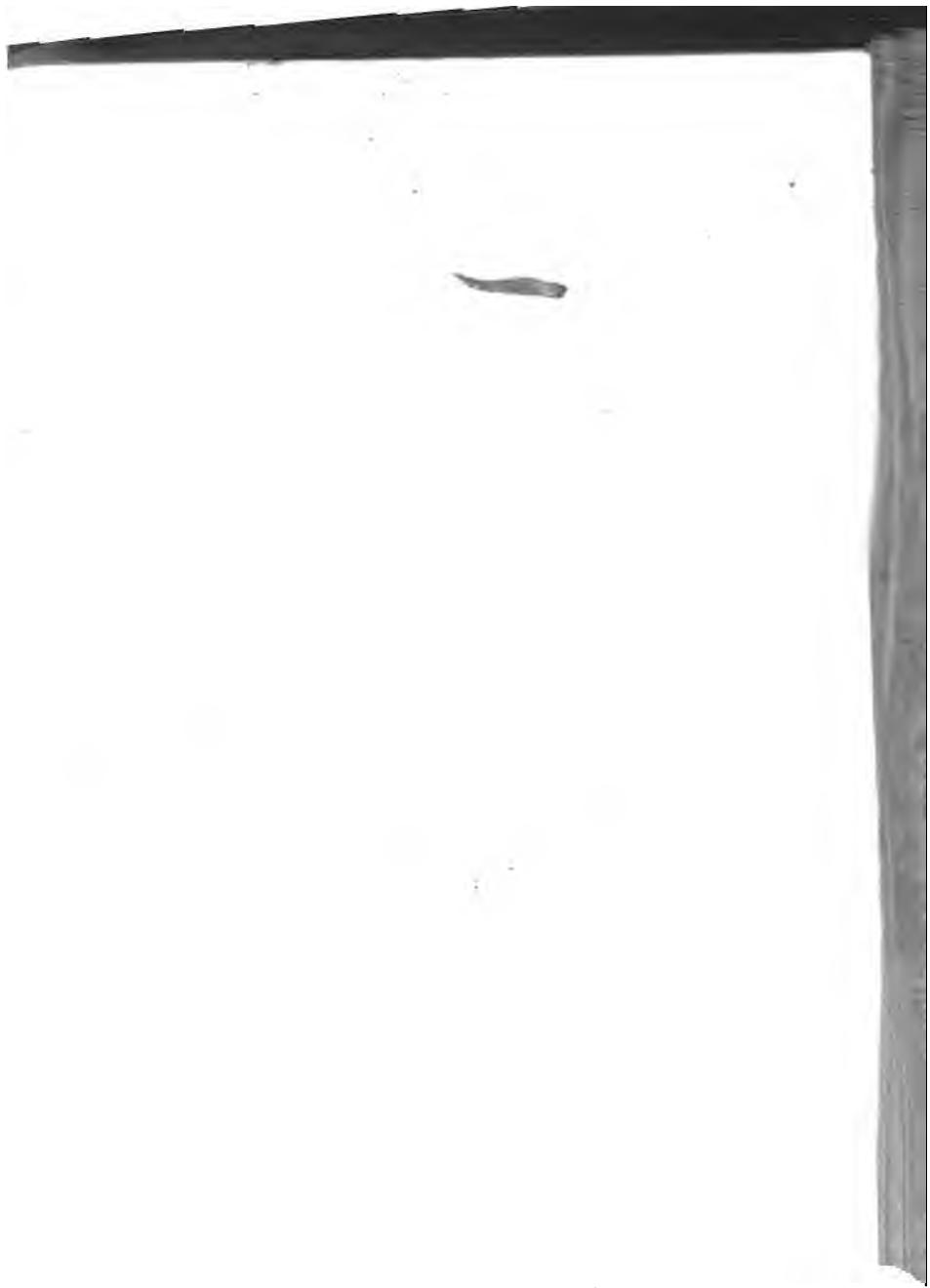


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THE BOYS ON THE QUAY.—PAGE 12.

OUR OLD UNCLE'S HOME,

AND WHAT THE BOYS DID THERE.

BY MOTHER CAREY.

With Illustrations by Walter Crane.



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OUR OLD UNCLE'S HOME; AND WHAT THE BOYS DID THERE.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE BOYS.

AH! sister!' observed Mr. Lawrence anxiously, as a lady entered the breakfast-room at The Refuge one lovely May morning. 'Here's serious news! Robert is ordered abroad again, quite suddenly. Of course his wife goes with him, and they take the two little girls. But the three boys must come here, if we can take them in!'

'Three boys—come here—dreadful, brother!' exclaimed Miss Mary in consternation.

'We will refuse, if we can, sister. But read this

letter. I do not see how it is possible. Robert only asks it until after the midsummer holidays,—that will be until the beginning of August, to be sure. But now it is May — ’

‘ Only the 6th, brother. What can we possibly do with three boys? It is dreadful, brother !’

‘ Read the letter, and see what answer we are to make,’ replied Mr. Lawrence, as he reached out his hand to give it to her. The action seemed to be accompanied with pain, for a pang crossed his brow ; a sight which at once recalled Miss Lawrence to herself, and caused her to hurry round the table to his chair. There, seating herself on the corner of a couch, she perused the boldly written letter, which he gave her.

Mr. Lawrence leant back in his wheeled chair, partly occupied in painful, puzzling thought, partly watching the effect her perusal was producing on his sister. She finished at length, and laying the letter on her lap, she said, ‘ The order seems a very sudden one. Of course Robert cannot refuse to go — ’

‘ Nor can we wonder that Jane and the girls accompany him.’

‘ No ! But those boys : would no school take them

for this month and next? And the holidays: are we always to have them then?"

"We need not look forward so far. Future holidays must depend on how these weeks pass. I wish I did not feel so helpless!—were not so helpless, indeed."

"Oh! brother!" exclaimed Miss Mary, tenderly kissing him, for she never could bear to hear him make any allusion to his crippled state. It was a state in which he had been from infancy; and as he had never known any other, one might have supposed that it would have troubled him but little. But such, she well knew, was not the case. Not only were his bodily sufferings by no means slight, but the mortification entailed upon a sensitive mind by his inability to move, by his being a 'cripple,' a cumberer of the ground, so he thought, was at times most bitterly keen. She was disposed, therefore, to regard the advent of these dreadful boys with extreme dislike on his account. But on her own, also, they were about the last guests she would willingly have admitted at *The Refuge*.

Mr. Lawrence had inhabited this sequestered pretty little home for more than forty-five years, and for nearly as long had his devoted sister been

his nurse and companion. He purchased the property shortly after his father's death, and had at once settled himself upon it. His domain, not a very large one, stretched along the level bank of a broad, shallow river ; so that he could be wheeled up and down, for his daily 'constitutional,' at the smallest possible expense of labour to his servant. The gardens, which were large, well stocked, and well kept, were likewise flat, or nearly so ; as were the shrubberies, and indeed the whole environs of the house.

Miss Lawrence had joined him as soon as her education was complete. The death of their father—a London merchant—their last remaining parent, had left her without a home ; and she had devoted herself to the care of this invalid brother with a steady perseverance of which few young people are capable. She had now grown old in her labour of love, but her tenderness to its object was as fresh as ever—deepened perhaps by length of exercise, perhaps sobered by age, but to him as comforting and delightful as ever.

Still time and seclusion had wrought their effects on both brother and sister—more, perhaps, on her than on him. His sufferings gave him occasion for

daily struggles and triumphs. Her life flowed on more evenly, with the same daily duties, daily cares, daily nursing—punctually performed ; and perhaps her mind grew a little narrowed and formal under this very regular routine. She was never called upon to sympathize out of her home circle, except by a few poor people ; and it is possible that her powers of sympathy had become somewhat confined. In person she was small and slight, spotlessly clean in dress, and not a little old-fashioned. In habits, she was punctuality, neatness, and precision personified. Such was the lady to whom the appearance of three boys on a three months' visit seemed *so* dreadful.

To Mr. Lawrence it seemed dreadful, for other reasons. He knew almost as little about boys as his sister, and felt more hopeless in entertaining them. They might laugh at him, he feared ; they might put his sister out ; they might disturb the household. Oh ! how could any one measure the amount of mischief three boys might do !

' My dear Mary, what shall we do ? ' he exclaimed in despair.

' We cannot say no, I fear,' replied Miss Lawrence. ' Suppose we ring for Robins, and consult

her? You know, if the house will not hold them comfortably, nor the servants like it, we must say no.'

And she rose and rang the bell.

'Tell Robins we want to speak with her,' she said to the answering footman; and Robins appeared—a formal, old-fashioned servant, in rustling black silk and a spotless white muslin apron.

'Robins!' exclaimed her mistress, 'here is terrible news. Colonel Lawrence is ordered abroad again, and the three sons are to come here.'

'If we can take them in!' exclaimed her master, clinging to the hope his sister had caused to bud in his heart.

Robins took a minute to understand. 'Is Mrs. Lawrence going with the Colonel then, ma'am?' she inquired. 'And are the young gentlemen to live here always?'

'Heaven forbid!' cried both master and mistress; while Mr. Lawrence added, 'They remain here only till after the midsummer holidays. Then they go to school.'

'Does any one come with them—servant or no?' asked Robins.

'No; the boys alone. But they come next week, if we can take them in.'

'Oh yes, sir; we can take them in. They can have the big black panelled room, with three beds put into it very well, sir; and it opens near the back stairs, so the young gentlemen can run up and down without coming across the front hall, sir.'

'Yes, yes; a very good thing too.'

'They can have a washing-stand and a chest of drawers each, and a towel-horse,' observed Miss Mary.

'Yes, ma'am, and the room has plenty of convenience for their clothes besides. Shall Letty wait on them, ma'am?'

'Well, yes. I think so. But, Robins, we must have very strict rules—about the hall, and the stairs, and about clean shoes, and all that, you know.'

'Yes, ma'am; of course. Are the young gentlemen to have any tutor whilst they stay, or teaching?'

'No; my brother thinks they had better run wild at first. They are only just home, and require rest, he thinks.'

'That's a mistake,' observed Mrs. Robins, 'humbly begging the Colonel's pardon. An hour or two of lessons hurts nobody. They'll find the day very long without it.'

'Well, perhaps so. But Colonel Lawrence wishes it.'

'Yes, sir; yes, of course. Then shall I have everything ready early next week?'

'Yes, I suppose so, Robins, since thus it must be!'

And Robins left the room.

'That is all settled,' said Miss Lawrence with a sigh. 'Will you write, brother, and say so?'

'Yes, I will. What a change it will be for us, Mary! I hope we may get on well!'

'I hope so; if not, they must go to school. You must not be made ill, brother.'

'Nor you worn out, sister. But we will hope for better things.'



CHAPTER II.

ALONE ON THE QUAY.

ABOUT a week after this perturbation in the family at the Refuge, three little mournful lads were standing together on Southampton Docks, sadly watching the departure of the steamer that had just been warped out on her way to a foreign land. She was fast disappearing down Southampton Water, bearing with her, father, mother, and sisters of the disconsolate boys, who were gathered close together in a melancholy group watching her. Not for five long years were they likely to see any of their dear ones again. They were strangers to English relatives, English climate, and English ways. Except a servant, who had accompanied them on the homeward voyage,—thus unexpectedly terminated by an order to return,—they knew no one at

Southampton. They had only arrived there the day before from London, to pass the last evening with their family; and a most melancholy last evening it had been. Mrs. Lawrence, poor soul, had striven her utmost not to give in, for the sake of her husband and children; but her efforts had not been too successful. Her husband had taken the boys for a walk, in the hopes of cheating himself and them into forgetfulness of the coming separation. But the poor little sisters had proved quite inconsolable, and their example had fairly upset all the others. It was a wretched evening; and it occasioned afterwards much self-reproach to both Colonel and Mrs. Lawrence, that they should have allowed their boys to separate from them with so sad a remembrance. But it could not now be helped. It was of the past, when the three children—for they were nothing else—stood alone on that black, coal-strewn wharf,—Edward, a thoughtful, healthy lad of twelve; Richard, his next brother, a dark-haired, dark-eyed, giddy-pated pickle; and little Tom, a quaint, fair-haired boy of eight.

Richard was the first to break silence.

'Oh Ted! Five years! it will never be over,'

he cried, and his lips quivered. ‘It was a shame sending them away.’

‘What are we to do?’ inquired poor little Tom, whose eyes were red, and whose head ached with crying. ‘What are we to do now, Ted?’

‘We are to try and act like men!’ repeated Edward, trying to impress upon himself his father’s almost last words. But the effort failed, and he burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing.

‘Don’t, Ted, don’t,’ exclaimed his brother, crying for company, and half frightened. ‘Richard, look at Ted; come to Ted!’

But poor Dick was down on his own account, striving to check his misery over a stone pillar close by, and could offer no assistance to his brothers.

‘Oh don’t, Ted, don’t!’ implored Tommy. ‘Mamma is not here; oh don’t!’

Edward roused himself at this appeal; he had somewhat exhausted his sorrow, and he remembered that poor Tommy had no mother near to dry his tears. He did therefore rouse himself manfully.

‘We ought to go,’ he said; ‘we shall lose the train if we don’t. Dobbs said we must be back by half-past twelve, to get some dinner and be off.’

‘I don’t want any dinner!’ protested Richard

stoutly. ‘I can’t eat, and I shan’t go while I can see the ship.’

‘That won’t be much longer, my boy,’ said a kind voice behind them; ‘she will be out of sight in another quarter of an hour.’

The speaker was a clergyman, who, unperceived, had drawn near the forlorn trio, struck by their evident grief; and who now very kindly seated himself on Richard’s pillar, and taking wee Tom on his knees, drew from them the cause of their sorrow.

‘Poor lads, poor lads!’ he pitifully exclaimed. ‘It is hard for you—very hard. But what are you to do now? Are you going to school to-night? It was sad to leave you here alone.’

‘Oh, sir,’ replied Edward, ‘this was our own doing. Papa offered to take us to Uncle Lawrence’s house, if we liked, before he left; but we had rather see the last of them—much rather. And we have Dobbs. He is going with us.’

‘And Dobbs can take care of you?’ said the clergyman, smiling.

‘Oh yes, quite well. I am afraid, sir, we ought to be going. Dobbs said we were to be back by half-past twelve at the inn.’

‘To catch the train then? or for dinner?’

'For dinner.'

'Then we'll leave Dobbs to dine at the inn, and you come and dine with me. You want to catch the 2.30 train, I suppose?'

'I think so,' replied Edward. 'But we had better see Dobbs first.'

'Yes, we will call at the inn; it is on the way to my house. Now look at the ship—how pretty she looks in this bright sun! They have had nice weather for a start.'

'They will soon be gone,' sighed Richard with a quivering lip.

Edward durst not trust himself to speak; Tom's head was resting on the kind clergyman's shoulder. So the boys watched the disappearance of the packet.

'The Almighty grant them a good passage, and a safe return home! Five years is not so long to me, my boys. In the meantime you must be good, brave lads, and not add to their pain at going away. Where are you to be when they return?'

'When they return!' But still it comforted the boys to hear this spoken of so simply and naturally.

'We don't know,' replied Edward. 'We are to go to a school all together after midsummer; but until

then, we go to an uncle's house—Mr. Lawrence, at The Refuge.'

'What sort of a place is it?' inquired their kind friend as he rose from his seat, and, still retaining Tommy's hand, led the way from the water-side.

'We know nothing about it, really,' replied Edward again. 'Uncle Lawrence is a cripple himself,—he has been always so; and Aunt Mary is his sister,—she takes care of him, and has always, I believe.'

'Are they old people?' asked the gentleman.

'I should think so,' exclaimed Richard; 'very old indeed! Sixty or seventy or eighty! and horribly clean and particular. Uncle never could walk or ride; and aunt —' And Richard left the rest of his sentence to be filled by imagination.

The clergyman laughed; but he felt very sorry for the little fellows, apparently going alone to so very uncongenial a home.

'Are there any other boys near?' inquired he. 'I suppose neither your uncle nor aunt have ever been married?'

'Never,' answered the boys. And Richard continued, 'There are no boys anywhere near. I am sure I don't know what we shall do.'

'We are three of us,' said Edward.

'Oh, well; and what can three play at? Not cricket, nor Tom Tytler's ground, nor anything.'

'Yes! Tom Tytler's ground: three can play that! We will find something to do.'

'I don't believe we can, then. We shall have to sit tidy indoors all day.'

'I am sure not,' exclaimed Edward. 'We will find something to do out of doors, where we shan't bother uncle and aunt; for mamma said we must not do that. And it is only three months, you know, Dick; then we go to school.'

'Bravo, my boy!' cried their friend; 'that's the way to look at things; and three months nearer their coming home. Well done! But is not this Dobbs coming?'

'Yes,' replied they, as a servant in a sort of groom's undress livery approached them. 'Come, Master Lawrence,' said he, 'you'll be late.'

'Do you think you can trust your young gentlemen with me for dinner?' asked the clergyman of this man. 'I am the clergyman of the parish—Mr. Talbot. The people of the inn will tell you all about me; and I will meet you at the train by 2.30, if you will bring the luggage there.'

Dobbs gave a searching glance at his questioner,

and an inquiring glance at Edward, and, apparently satisfied with their result, he touched his hat with a willing assent, and departed on his return to the inn.

Mr. Talbot took the boys on to a pretty cottage at some little distance, where they were cordially received by his wife and daughter—the latter, a stout little girl, with a merry smile, and frank, pleasant manners. As soon as the introduction was over, Mr. Talbot sent the boys off to wash their hands.

'Come, be off now, and tidy yourself. Probably, with your particular uncle and aunt, that will become one of the positive duties of life.' He spoke jestingly, yet his tone was not only playful.

'Duties of life! washing one's hands! pshaw!' cried Dick as the boys entered the room in which they were to tidy themselves. 'I thought learning one's lessons, and going to church, and all that, were duties.'

'I suppose it will be a duty to avoid annoying uncle and aunt,' thought Edward to himself, without, however, attempting any reply to his brother's words.

'How kind Mr. Talbot is!' said little Tommy.

'Yes, he is. I wonder what makes him so kind?' observed Dick.

'I think he must have been sorry for us,' returned Tommy.

Richard drew himself up: 'I don't mean any one to be sorry for me,' returned he proudly.

'Oh, nonsense,' cried Edward. 'I am sure we did want kindness then, and I am sure a good dinner here is a great deal better than Dobbs and the inn!'

The dinner was a very good plain one, and Mr. Talbot took good care that his young guests were not late for the train. He bade them good-bye, filling their pockets with some of the last of his winter apples, and with gingerbread and biscuits, and making them promise, if ever they came to Southampton again, that they would come and visit him.

The boys departed, strangely comforted, and almost happy. There was, after all, great excitement in the journey and the change of scene, and a great sense of manliness and responsibility in being so much left to take care of themselves. Nor was it until after their tea in the coffee-room of the strange inn, at which they slept for the

night,—until, indeed, they had retired to their bedroom,—that the bitter sense of loneliness again oppressed them, and made the going to bed very hard work. Poor Tommy was dead tired—too tired to sleep, or to have power to stop his sobs; Richard, fortunately, was just so tired that he could not possibly keep awake; and it was left to Edward to act the part of soother, and lean over his almost baby brother until he had fallen asleep. These boys, with England in prospect, had never left their parents before; and no one, surely, will deem them wanting in manliness, if this sudden and complete bereavement was more than they knew how to bear. On the contrary, all the three, each in his own way, showed a very praiseworthy determination to do his best, and help the others to endure this really, to them, severe trial.

The next morning they were roused in good time by Dobbs, and, after a delicious breakfast of coffee, toast, bacon, and eggs, which they heartily enjoyed, they continued their journey to the junction at which Dobbs was to leave them. He was on his way to his own home—a long journey, still further on. They would have but two stations to

pass alone, before finding themselves at the one where their uncle's cart and man were to meet them. And this bit they accomplished very successfully, soon recovering from their sorrow at parting with Dobbs, in eager curiosity at what was to come.

For he had only returned with the family to England, for the sake of the passage home. He was not an old servant ; so, though in the absence of all other acquaintance the boys were much inclined to mourn his departure, they would have cared little about it under other circumstances.

They had scarcely time, however, to say good-bye, before the train moved on. One station was quickly passed ; the second came, and also passed ; the third, and they were to get out and meet their uncle's servant and their new life.



CHAPTER III.

THE BOYS' ARRIVAL.

'**J**EAMES' and his cart were duly in waiting for the young gentlemen as they jumped out of the train ; and as their luggage was small, and the little wayside station offered no temptation to loiter, 'Jeames' and his charge were speedily stowed into the cart, and on their way to The Refuge.

There was not much in the country through which they passed to distract the boys' curiosity. It was well wooded with oak trees just opening into leaf ; but it was flat, and therefore rather uninteresting. Here and there they crossed streams, once a broad lazy river, which the man told his young companions ran, 'after a while,' close under their uncle's lawn, where it spread out very broad, very shallow, and - times almost too lazy to run at all. The boys

did not care much for all this ; they were longing to hear something of the life at The Refuge—something that would guide them as to what they were to encounter.

'James ! that's my uncle's horse ?' inquired one.

'Ay ! sure.'

'Has he many of them ?'

'No ; only this one, and an old grey, and a donkey. Master can't ride, and Missus don't drive.'

'Any ponies ?' inquired the boys again.

'No ! Who wanted any ? No good,' was the reply.

'Any rabbits or dogs or cats ?'

'Plenty of rabbits in the hedges ; but Master had them all caught, when he could.'

'Dogs : were there no dogs ?'

'No ; they'd be rummaging Miss Lawrence's flower-beds, and that she could noways abide ; or dirtying indoors, and that Mrs. Robins would not like.'

'Who was Mrs. Robins ?' This was quite a new personage to the boys.

'She was the housekeeper, and a very particular body indeed ; almost as particular as Miss Lawrence herself.'

This was terrible news to the boys. They began on another subject.

'What sort of a garden was there at uncle's?'

'Beautiful gardens!' exclaimed James, driven out of his taciturnity by the question. 'Three of them — the kitchen-garden, the orchard-garden, and Miss Lawrence's own flower-garden. There weren't gardens to beat them, for their size, anywhere near. The young gentlemen must mind how they played in them, though, for they were wonderful tidy. Miss Lawrence, and indeed Master himself, took uncommon pride in them.'

'Where are we to play, then?' inquired the poor boys.

James affirmed that he was 'blessed if he knew'; but he added, seeing the crestfallen looks of his auditors, 'There is an old island in the midst of the river, and a linhay full of straw, and some fine trees in the field-walk. I reckon you may play there.'

An island, a linhay, and some trees! That did not sound so bad, though. The boys' faces brightened.

'Where was the island?' they eagerly asked.

'In the river, to be sure,' said James.

'But how could they get at it? By a boat?'

'No, there was no boat; they must swim.'

They could not swim a bit, any of the three. So their hopes faded again. They turned to the linhay: what chance of that?

'Well,' James thought, 'that might do if it was allowed; which he much doubted.'

'And the trees?'

'Well, they might do too, if Master and Missus did not get afraid, which was most likely.'

The boys' hearts sank within them.

'We shall have to walk straight up and down, like old people!' cried Richard. 'I'll go to the island, if I drown for it.'

'Best not tell Miss Lawrence so,' observed James.

'What is the house like?' asked Edward.

'It is a pretty place enough,' replied their driver; 'but you must mind the hall, it's polished like glass. You see, no one walks on it hardly but Miss Lawrence, and the servants in list-shoes.'

'Is aunt *very* clean?' inquired little Tommy.

'Yes, little master, she has not a spot on her dress from year's end to year's end; and she don't allow spots anywhere else, if she can help them.'

'How far is the house off now?'

'There it is, in among those trees close by,' said James, pointing to a roof and some chimneys at a very little distance off.

The boys ceased their questioning. They were too close to this dreaded abode. They watched every turn in the road, every peep that opened of this new home. At first the road seemed leading direct to the river, whose sparkling waters they could see through the trees.

'Are those *the* trees?' they asked in a whisper. James answered by a nod, and signed with his whip to a long row of them that passed in front of The Refuge, and continued to some distance along the river-bank.

A great awe was creeping over the orphaned trio. But withal a great curiosity possessed them.

Soon the road turned sharp round a corner, and the low green gate of The Refuge stood before them. It stood open, and in they drove. The carriage-drive wound round the front, just outside the lawn, and, despite their alarm, they could not repress a cry of admiration, as the lawn with its exquisite turf, the flower-beds of lovely flowers, and the trees and water burst upon their sight. Still they felt James was terribly right. It was no possible place for

them to play in. Not a flower nor a leaf nor a blade seemed untidy or out of place. Fancy football, or a race, or Tom Tytler's ground on such turf, and among such beds as lay there!

Their eyes sought the trees and river for a refuge; and there on one side, prominent, but not intercepting the view, stood a fair-sized, hilly, rocky island, separated, however, from them by a good broad stretch of sparkling water. It was an El-Dorado to them; and across that river, somehow, Richard forthwith determined he would get.

But they approached the front door, and before it stood a portly dame, clad in her usual garb of black silk, adorned with the white muslin apron. She wore a brown front of little curls, and a cap with bows all over it.

'James, take the luggage round behind. It may hurt the paint coming in this way.'

'Yes, marm,' said James, dropping his boys and driving off.

'How do you do, young gentlemen?' proceeded the old housekeeper, cheerily shaking hands with each. 'Welcome to The Refuge. I'm Mrs. Robins. I suppose you know that? Wipe your shoes and come in.'

The boys, pleased with the kindness of her greeting, obeyed her commands most vigorously, rubbing away at their shoes on the mat as if they had taken a dusty walk instead of a clean drive. The housekeeper watched them.

'Now tell me your names,' she said.

'I am Edward,' and 'I am Richard.'

'And you must be little Master Tommy, then !'

said the kindly woman, patting his head.

Why, the boys could have worshipped her. But the ordeal had still to be passed through. She led them across the hall, which in this direction was rendered safe by matting, to the sitting-room, in which their aunt and uncle expected them.

It may perhaps appear strange to young readers, but it was nevertheless the sober truth, that the three trembling boys, who were now introduced to that old lady and gentleman of hoary head and length of days—that these three boys did not anticipate the interview with one whit less dread than did their aged relatives!

'*What ARE we to do with three boys?*' had been vividly in their minds ever since they first heard of their coming. Each day had increased their alarm ; and now to unbend their stiffness, was

impossible to them. With all the will in the world to be kind, they nevertheless succeeded in so completely chilling the hearts of their young guests in this interview, that the boys heard the permission given to depart to their room with unbounded joy. They had been seated for nearly twenty minutes on separate chairs answering solemn questions put to them by uncle or aunt, in tones so constrained and low, that it had obliged the boys to whisper in reply.

'What a dreadful uncle and aunt!' exclaimed Dick, who was the first to recover himself. 'But the housekeeper is jolly enough; and this is not a bad room, is it?'

This was their bedroom, their own room. It was of good size, with the walls half-whitewashed, half-panelled in black. One jolly big cupboard in the wall occupied the whole height in the middle of one side. Arranged in due form and with great decorum, stood, in their respective places, three white beds, spotlessly clean, three white wash-stands with white jugs and basins, etc., three white tables, three white towel-horses with two towels each, and one bonnie big bath; besides three rush-bottomed chairs, also white. This was

the furniture of the room. 'Not a bad room at all,' the boys adjudged it to be. Oh! we have forgotten one gigantic chest-of-drawers that stood in one corner.

'Come! I think we'll do here!' cried both Edward and Richard, after a short survey of their room,—a survey conducted with a sobriety and awe suitable to the extreme respectability of the furniture. But this mood could not last for ever.

'What a height up the drawers are!' said Dick. 'I'll try if I can climb them.'

And up he went by the handles, until he was triumphantly seated on the top, or lying rather; for there was no room to sit, so nearly did the upper slab of the drawers approach the ceiling. The room rose into a peaked roof in the centre, and across this a broad rafter stretched.

'I wonder whether I could get up there!' cried Richard more to himself than any one else.

'Oh! better not try; at least not yet,' exclaimed Edward, who could not shake off the awe inspired by his uncle and aunt.

And little Tommy paused in his tour of inspection round the room, and in another minute Dick

descended from his eyrie. But he was not to be restrained too far. He began examining the cupboards. They were shelved half-way up by one shelf. ‘Oh, jolly!’ soliloquized Dick, as with a run and a jump in he got, followed by Tommy. Edward could not resist it; and soon all three boys were standing inside, with the door half shut.

‘Hush! I hear some one coming,’ cried Dick.
‘Let’s shut the door, and jump out upon them.’

‘Do leave all these jokes for a while,’ pleaded Edward. ‘This is an awful place! One does not know what one may do yet. When are we to go down again, I wonder? I shall take my boots off.’

And he jumped out and began to do so, seated at the foot of his bed. The other boys jumped out too.

‘Which bed do you mean to take, Edward?’ inquired the talkative Dick. ‘I shall take this, if you don’t mind. But, I say, the furniture is a deal too formal. Look here! I’ll have a house!’ So—and so—and so—and Dick pushed and pulled and planted about his self-chosen possessions according to his fancies, the other boys pausing in their boot-changing operations to watch him.

After a complete twirl-about of all pre-existing arrangements, it came into somebody's head to cry out :

'Oh ! but, I say, what will Mrs. Robins say if we pull it all about so ?'

'She can't possibly care,' protested Richard ; 'but we had better do it all at once, and not frighten her twice.'

Thus advised, the boys finished their arrangements, and gazed with great satisfaction at the changes they had made. Two tidy separate little rooms—one for Richard by himself, and the other for Ned and Tom.

'That's done,' said Dick ; 'but, Ned—that beam, I really must get up there. Come, what harm can we do ? Come, Edward, I am sure—I shall !'

And up the ladder of handles he scrambled again, followed by his brothers, who *could* not resist it. From the chest they got to the beam, where they straddled and rode to their utmost satisfaction. It certainly was a glorious place for a game of romps, and the boys stopped in their glee to communicate their surprise to each other that anything half so jolly should have been found at 'uncle's.'

One boy lay stretched out, half straddling, half lying on the beam ; another was riding across it ; the third was lying on the chest-of-drawers, with his heels wagging in mid-air after the fashion of boys, when the door opened, and a dainty maiden entered.

She bore a can of hot water in her hand. But she paused in the middle of the room, amazed at the change in its geography and the disappearance of its inmates. Her entrance recalled the boys in a measure to where they were ; but her look of surprise amused them exceedingly, and they began a series of low whistles and calls, which soon enlightened her as to their whereabouts.

She instantly recovered her self-possession, and, advancing further, she proceeded carefully to fill their three smaller jugs with hot water from her can ; then informing the young gentlemen that it was time 'to assume their evening attire for dinner,' she curtseyed and left the room.

The boys descended instanter from their beam, and stood in the middle of the room.

'I'm dished !' began the elegant Dick. 'That means, I'm basted, baked, cooked, and altogether done, if I know what my evening attire is.'

'Our Sunday best, I suppose,' replied Edward.
'And we had better be quick; I don't know how soon dinner may be ready.'

'I propose,' said Dick, 'that we throw all the hot water into the tub together,—it will make a good lot with some cold,—and have a wash.'

'So we will; only, make haste.'

And the boys carried out their idea with incredible speed. Not much more than a quarter of an hour elapsed before they were dressed in their best, looking as bright, healthy, gentlemanly lads as you could wish to see. And so they left their room, and proceeded, soberly enough, to the sitting-room, to await the dreaded entrance of their uncle and aunt.



CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST DAY AT 'THE REFUGE.'

HEY waited some time—to them it seemed an age—before the rumbling of wheels in the hall announced their uncle's approach. He entered in his chair, accompanied by Miss Lawrence, and paused in his passage through the room to greet the three boys before he was pushed on into the dining-room. The boys followed, and were soon seated in silence round a round-table, spread with a spotless snow-white table-cloth, and adorned with glass and silver, that sparkled where they stood. The whole dinner ménage was perfect, cooking and all; and desperately hungry were the boys. Whilst the eating lasted, they were comparatively happy; but when it passed into dessert and conversation, the tedium of formality became again oppressive. No two people could be more

incapable than Mr. and Miss Lawrence of making talk for their young guests. They had no subjects whatever in common ; they were nervously afraid of them ; and on the only subject that they believed would interest them—that of their mother and father—they dared not enter, for fear of consequences.

Dinner passed at length. Then Aunt Mary formally announced the programme for the evening, which, poor soul, she had carefully arranged and written out a week ago nearly.

' You will perhaps find pleasure in accompanying us on our evening's stroll up and down the avenue ? If you will fetch your hats and change your shoes, my brother and myself will await your return in the verandah.'

The boys marched up-stairs in obedience.

' Our shoes are thick enough, I think,' said Edward. ' We shall be quicker if we don't change ; and our hats are down-stairs.'

So the boys turned and ran down again.

' You have returned with speed,' remarked their aunt. ' Have you changed your shoes ?'

' No, ma'am,' replied Edward ; ' these are thick enough ; and we thought we had better not keep you waiting.'

'You had better return and change your shoes,' was the answer. 'It is best to obey; and it is a very bad habit to keep on the same shoes indoors and out.'

The rebuked boys fled up-stairs again with a speed and a clatter quite unusual in that quiet, silent house. It caused Miss Lawrence to turn round quickly after them, and then to remark to her brother :

'We must correct that in time, brother. It is not good to move so noisily, especially in an invalid's house.'

'It will do me no harm,' replied Mr. Lawrence. 'I would not tease the boys about it.'

'No, not yet.'

'I hope this will not prove too grave a home for the poor little lads. I wish I knew what to do with them!'

'It is our misfortune to have them, brother. We must do the best we can.'

The boys returned much subdued. For they had found their room tidied, their nice little houses all broken up, and the three beds soberly arranged in a row against the wall, as of old. Whether invisible hands had performed this unwelcome feat or not, it was done; and the boys felt utterly rebuked.

The cavalcade started for the avenue,—the chair containing Mr. Lawrence, drawn by a donkey in boots, that its footprints might not unduly impress the gravel or the turf—the footman, ancient and solemn, in grey with silver buttons, and a silver band round his hat—Miss Lawrence walking by the side of the chair, and the three brothers behind. Every now and then they fell a little back, to indulge in quiet remarks between themselves; but they were as often called up again to reply to some remark put to them by their elders.

The drive led them through the garden to the avenue by the river-side, under *the* trees of which James had told them. Certainly James was right: they could not have found more glorious trees to climb than these old oaks and elms—not above their reach the lower branches; the upper formed seats and rests and landing-places, charming enough to whet the longing of any boys.

‘Oh, what glorious trees!’ burst from them all as they gazed at them. ‘I could get up there, and there, and there.’

‘And build a nest there; only see!’

‘But,’ said Miss Lawrence, calmly eyeing her charge, ‘I must depend—indeed we must depend,’

she added pointedly—‘on your attempting no such thing! You are under our charge now, and we cannot permit you to risk your lives in anything so unnecessary as climbing trees. Lives were given us for use, not to be wasted. Besides, your father and mother are not rich, and you must learn to take care of your clothes, for their sakes; from love to them, you must not climb those trees.

The donkey and chair had continued their course whilst this oration was being uttered, and Miss Lawrence now turned to follow them. The boys shrank back abashed, not daring to look much more at the trees, lest they should be suspected of an underhand intention of climbing them.

The river now became fully visible; and very lovely it was. The island stood about five hundred yards from the bank; but the water between them and it looked delightfully shallow. The boys' hopes rose as they looked at it. But this new doctrine of taking care of their clothes would stop this fun too, and the linhay-fun too. Alas! what should they do? They felt as if they should stop growing, if they had to walk behind that donkey-chair till August.

However, the chair now turned to meet them, and they made way for it to pass. Then, resuming their

position in the rear, the procession slowly returned to the house.

'What are your usual hours for retiring to rest?' inquired Miss Lawrence as she paused in the doorway.

The boys were quite puzzled. They had no very regular bed-time, but, after consideration, they said from eight to nine.

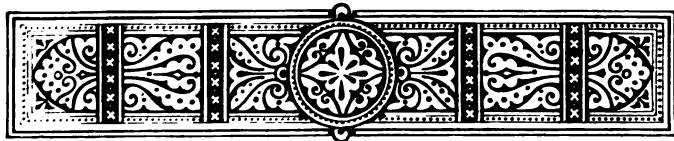
'Then, Lazarus, bid Matilda come for each young gentleman at intervals of half an hour, beginning at eight o'clock. But it is a very late hour;' and Miss Lawrence sighed, for she and her brother retired to rest at nine, and this lateness of the boys would deprive them of all quiet evenings. 'You can go and change your shoes,' she observed to the brothers, 'and hang up your hats in your cupboard.'

The boys obeyed in silence; though I would not say that Dick did not fling his hat at its peg several times before he could command sufficient patience to hang it there.

They descended to find a solemn game of cards prepared for them—a game played in silence. Precisely at eight Matilda appeared for 'Master Thomas,' who had never been aught but Tommy or Tom in all his long life; exactly half an hour

afterwards, Richard was summoned ; and on the stroke of nine, Edward. Matilda did not attempt to undress the young gentlemen ; but she notified to each that the candles would be put out at half-past nine precisely,—an event that took place ‘precisely,’ as she had announced ; and she departed, after informing her victims—for so they felt themselves to be—that at seven on the following morning they would be called, for breakfast with Mr. and Miss Lawrence at eight.

Certainly no five people parted from each other more willingly than did the hosts and guests on that memorable Wednesday evening. The boys were almost cowed into despair. Miss Lawrence was perhaps the best satisfied, because she had found the boys amenable to command—a virtue that she had not by any means expected ; nor did she perceive how completely she had chilled and awed them. Her brother did ; and he went to bed, much distressed at the thought that their reception at The Refuge was very unlike an arrival at home. He did not know what to do, poor man—not he ; but he felt painfully doubtful whether his sister did either ; and he was more puzzled than ever to understand ‘what they would do with three boys !’



CHAPTER V.

CHILLING AND DRILLING.

THURSDAY! Friday! Saturday! The same weary round of formal courtesies and solemn amusements! Aunt Mary, at great trouble to herself, ‘showed’ the gardens (and, *entre nous*, at equal trouble to the boys). Then she gave her young guests permission to walk ‘up and down,’ if they pleased; but so grave a perambulation they did not please to take.

Breakfast, luncheon, and dinner passed one after the other, regularly, and with unimpeachable propriety and exceeding dulness. The boys took the usual solemn constitutional, evening after evening—donkey, chair, and man; in which they gazed with yearning eyes at the trees and the island, but remembered with saddened hearts the rule of this extraordinary place, ‘that from love to their parents they must not spoil their clothes.’

'Jolly gammon! Spoil our clothes indeed! Sunday clothes, of course, we may not spoil; but our common things!—as if papa would ever stop our climbing trees, or getting over to that island. Oh, if we only could! What *are* we to do, Edward?'

But poor Edward could not tell. He was as much oppressed and puzzled as his brothers. Mr. Lawrence saw that the poor children were very unhappy, and he told his sister that he feared they did not feel at home. But she did not see it, and she was so agreeably surprised to find herself implicitly obeyed, that she assured him the boys were satisfied, and would soon be quite happy.

Saturday turned out a wet morning. Besides, the gardens had been 'shown'; and Aunt Mary did not know what next to do. She had a great dislike to rain and mud, as being dirty things, so she declined to take the boys their morning walk. They would not have cared for this over-much, I am afraid. But they were summoned to the study, and there seated by the table with a book apiece—not allowed to sit, or lie, or roll anyhow, but seated like 'old people' by the table, with 'uncle' reading at one side, and 'aunt' writing at another. The books, too, were not light reading. One was a

grave, grown-up history; one, some poetry—Young's *Night Thoughts*, full of pictures, fortunately; whilst on Tommy was bestowed a botanical work, since he had betrayed more interest in the subject of flowers than either of his brothers. Luncheon did at last break the monotony of this never-ending morning; and after lunch Miss Lawrence proposed to the boys a walk into the country. They soon ascertained that she was not to be their companion, and accepted the offer with great alacrity. Their dismay may be conceived when they found they were to walk with Matilda Letitia (the damsel possessed both names), like girls with a maid! Well, they started in all due form. But never did Matilda Letitia take such a walk in her life. They were in wild spirits—the reaction after all the restraint of the last few days; and 'up hill and down dale'—in other words, up hedges, and along ditches, and across fields, and through woods—they led Matilda, dirtying themselves to their hearts' content, and dirtying her, by no means to hers. She only got them home at last by threatening to walk off by herself, and report them missing when she reached home. They dared not quite risk this, so they followed. Arrived home, they

clattered up the back stairs to their room—where they gathered together, and surveyed the mess they were in, with *not unmixed* satisfaction.

'I wonder how much love we have for our parents!' quoth Edward. 'I am sure you have none, Dick. Just look at your boots!'

'I say! I like that; just look at your muddy trousers! I am sure your love is as bad. What do you say, Tommy?'

'I'm horrid wet,' replied Tommy. 'I jumped into that ditch; I didn't mean it; but I could not get over. I don't think Matilda will want a walk again soon; do you?'

'No, indeed,' said Dick. 'But, Edward, what are we to do? I can't live on like this till August; I can't.'

'How can we help it? We can't write to papa—we should get no answer before August, scarcely; and we know no one else. I wish we could ask some one what to do.'

The three boys began unlacing their boots and slipping off their dirty things in silence. Suddenly Richard burst out with, 'I wish Mr. Talbot were here! He would be the man to help us. Don't you remember he told us we should probably have

tree-climbing and plenty of fun? I am sure he would not bother about our clothes.'

Mr. Talbot! Yes, there did seem a friend at hand. But how could Edward get at him, on his own and his brothers' behalf? Writing was a strong measure, and matters were not ripe for that yet. There seemed no other way; but Edward could not make up his mind to take such an extreme course at present.

Matilda had in the meanwhile repaired to her aunt, the housekeeper, with all her mud upon her dainty garments, and all her annoyance swelling at her heart. Mrs. Robins was engaged in examining some beautiful linen table-cloths at the time; and, spectacle on nose, she listened to her niece's tale. An unsoftened one it was, for Matilda was aggrieved bitterly. As the tale was finished, Mrs. Robins returned to her linen in silence, to her niece's surprise, who impatiently asked if such doings were to be allowed.

'You must not walk with them again,' replied her aunt. 'One of the men must go, if they can't be trusted alone. Go and tidy yourself, and don't make any complaint. I will speak to Master and Mistress about it. I am certain,' she continued to

herself, as Matilda angrily left the room,—‘I am certain we are doing ill by these boys. They are young spirited things, and we are making them live the lives of old maids and invalids. It will never do ; I am certain of it !’

And good Robins continued her task, considering in the meantime what she had best do about the boys. The first step she took was to carry up their hot water herself. She did not seem to observe the heaps of garments strewn about the floor,—she merely remarked that Matilda was tired with so long and weary a walk, and she should not trust her in the boys’ care again ; and shut the door behind her as she finished her sentence.

‘Trust her in our care ! I thought we were in hers !’ exclaimed Edward. ‘I am sure I did not understand that ; did you, Richard ?’

‘No ! to be sure not. Maybe she would have been better used, if we had known that. But it’s a dreadful place—a dreadful place !’

Mrs. Robins made no attempt to seek her master or mistress, she really felt disinclined to make any complaint of the boys. She had had a boy of her own once, and she felt much pity for these, so to speak, orphaned children ; so she let them and their

dirt alone for that time, determining that, as far as she could, she would take the attendance on them upon herself, and thus remove Matilda from a worry that she could not understand.

But Sunday brought matters to a climax ; and this was the manner how :—Poor Miss Lawrence, who entirely discredited her brother's croaking about the boys, and whose astonishment, as I have said, equalled her delight at finding herself so obeyed,—whose sympathies were not yet aroused for her young guests, and whose knowledge of children was *nil*, whilst her sense of duty was STRONG,—dear Miss Lawrence had carefully arranged how this Sunday should be spent.

She unfortunately belonged to that school of religionists who consider ‘holy’ to mean the reverse of agreeable or amusing. Therefore, being bidden to ‘keep the Sabbath holy,’ she made it a fast from all light and joyful pastime. Her face was drawn down to an unusual length every Sunday morning, and so remained until Monday permitted her to relax it. After a time the boys learnt to call it aunt’s Sunday face. Mr. Lawrence could not ‘keep the Sabbath’ with the same chilling solemnity as his sister. His nature would not allow him.



THE DULL SUNDAY.—PAGE 46.



He had not, and never could have had, either a Sunday face or a Sunday manner.

Now, with regard to the boys, Miss Lawrence, as we have said, had considered carefully how this Sunday was to be spent.

Two long and unusually slow services, the solemn walking hither and thither, customary with The Refuge household, and the meals, would of themselves have been sobering enough. But in addition Miss Lawrence had prescribed certain books on doctrine—(dry nuts to crack for older people, *those* books!)—or tales, with amusement so carefully weeded out as to be drier still, to be read aloud to herself. And in addition—and this straw broke those camels' backs—she exacted from each boy the recital of a hymn, to commence the labours of the day.

But she unexpectedly encountered an insuperable difficulty. Sunday had been a peculiarly happy day with the Lawrence children. They had learnt hymns for their parents, it is true, but they were generally old friends, and learnt in the week. Then, clustered round mamma, they used to listen to some Bible story, chosen by themselves. Certain amusing and some valuable illustrated books were kept sacred to the day, and drawing, even painting,

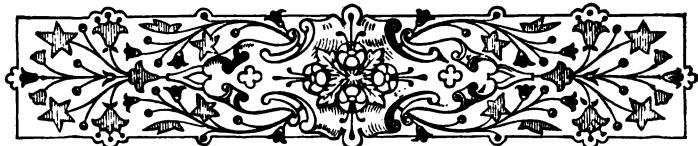
was allowed, provided they took care 'to make no mess, and gave no trouble on Sunday.' Both parents seemed to belong to them on that day, to read, to talk, or walk with them; and frequently their evenings closed with music, played to them by their mother.

This first Sunday recalled from its commencement the bitterness of their separation; and when they were desired to recite a hymn apiece, the chosen ones were some that they had been in the habit of saying to their mother. If their aunt had given them the world, they could not have said them to her. Edward and Richard positively refused, with flushed cheeks and watery eyes, which she did not observe. Little Tommy, when bidden, dared not disobey. He began, but soon his voice failed him; and on his aunt observing his silence he burst into a flood of tears, which astonished and annoyed her. His brothers came to his assistance —Edward firmly, Richard passionately; both declaring that none of the three could or would do it, and that no one had any right to make them. Papa expressly said they were to have no lessons.

Miss Lawrence was astonished, and made a strong effort to subdue this unlooked-for rebellion. But

she had, as she knew, exceeded her powers, and she was obliged at last to retreat, angry and chagrined at her defeat. She could only preserve a most distant and dignified demeanour towards the culprits, who felt indeed most naughty and ill-used, but most determined not to yield. They never could submit to have all their cherished religious memories, left by their dear, dear parents, interfered with by this stiff, strange, solemn aunt.

Miss Lawrence complained indignantly to her brother, but with no satisfaction to herself or him. He felt, as he told her again, quite doubtful how far either of them had hit the right mode of management; and much afraid that the boys would be miserable, instead of happy, at The Refuge.



CHAPTER VI.

HELP ARRIVES.

BUT the boys were quite decided as to the course they should pursue. A letter to Mr. Talbot, written by Edward, but the work of the three, was indited and sent forthwith, telling him that they did not know what to do, they were so unhappy, and would he come and see?

The letter ran as follows:—

‘DEAR MR. TALBOT,—You were very kind to us on the quay, and in giving us a nice dinner, and those good apples. We are more unhappy almost now, and we can’t write to papa and mamma, because they are so far off. [Bitter tears did the children shed as they wrote this.] Uncle and aunt are very kind, and we mean to be very good, but it is all wrong somehow. We may not climb trees, and we may not dirt our clothes, and we can’t play.

They send us out to walk with Matilda the maid. And to-day they have made us say mamma's and papa's hymns. We would not, though; we could not! Do come and see, if it is not a very great trouble; or do something to help us. We don't know any one else.—We are, your affectionate

'EDWARD LAWRENCE.'

'RICHARD LAWRENCE.'

'THOMAS LAWRENCE.'

(Date and direction.)

'Heaven bless the poor boys!' exclaimed Mr. Talbot as he read this letter. '"We may not climb trees, we may not dirt our clothes, we may not play. We mean to be very good, but it is all wrong somehow." And what am I to do? Was ever man in such an awkward position in this world? I must go and take a walk upon it.'

And fetching his hat, he betook himself to the docks, and seated himself on the same stone he had occupied when the boys were there. He took out the letter again and re-read it. 'I had better go and see their uncle, I think. If it is all wrong, probably they are all equally puzzled by each other's company. But what an awkward visit!

I must go on the pretext of asking the boys here, I think, for a visit. I need not say I came on purpose. I must go home and see 'wife about it.'

Mrs. Talbot's opinions agreed with her husband's,—that he had better go himself; and the letter made so strong an impression upon her, that she persuaded him to start without delaying a day. Accordingly on the next morning he left Southampton, reaching the neighbourhood of The Refuge on the Tuesday evening after the note had been written. He waited until the next morning to call on Mr. Lawrence.

Affairs had not gone on much more pleasantly in The Refuge since Sunday. Miss Lawrence's annoyance at her defeat continued as great as at first. She had been entire mistress of her house, of its inmates, and of herself, for more than forty years. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if the defiance of three young children wounded her severely. Besides, her brother thought her mistaken, which was a heresy on his part, unheard of before. Robins, too, had been so inexplicably daring as to suggest different management, when consulted on the subject by her master and mistress; for Miss Lawrence had discovered the offence of the muddy

walk from Matilda herself, whose indignation had been by no means appeased by her aunt's coolness on the subject.

So Miss Lawrence was grievously annoyed. And the poor cripple, her brother, was as grievously puzzled. He could not endure to think her wrong ; but it was miserable to see the swollen eyes, and dejected sullen manners of his poor little guests, and to feel sure that they were *so* unhappy ! He believed Robins was right, and that more latitude, and less tidiness and formality, were necessary ; yet it would be a strong measure to allow a right to any person to be dirty and noisy there. Robins was certain, Mr. Lawrence was puzzled and vacillating, whilst Miss Lawrence was immovable in her view of the case.

As for the small culprits themselves, they felt extremely naughty and rebellious, therefore very miserable ; but when they thought of entire submission ('saying the hymns,' *that* meant), or of lasting on like this till August, they felt goodness to be impossible. They looked hopefully to Mr. Talbot's intercession, though of the boldness of which they had been guilty in writing to him it terrified them to think. Into all this tangled web

did Mr. Talbot put his foot, by walking to the hall door and ringing the bell, on the Wednesday after the boys' arrival.

He was ushered into the room, where Mr. Lawrence and his sister were sitting. The boys were absent. His card had been presented to them by the servant, but had given them little information. He was still obliged to introduce himself.

'I am come, Mr. Lawrence,' he began, after the first formalities had been gone through, 'to see some young friends, nephews of yours, with whom I made acquaintance at Southampton the other day, under rather mournful circumstances.' And the kind-hearted man related his meeting with the boys on the docks, and their watching together the departure of the steamer.

'Alas! poor little lads,' said their uncle. 'It is a melancholy fate that separates children from their parents, just at the time when their tender age most requires them.'

'It is indeed,' replied the clergyman; 'but,' he added with innocent guile, 'these have a pretty home provided for them here.'

'Yes, yes, pretty enough; but I doubt how far it will suit them. An old cripple, with his most

kind nurse, may be but sorry companions for lively boys of their age.'

'I should think, sir,' returned the clergyman, smiling, 'it would be productive of little but fatigue and worry, if they attempted to be companions at all in the sense in which one is accustomed to use the words, at least for the greater part of the day. Boys need freedom and sympathy, not companionship.'

'Surely, sir,' remarked Miss Lawrence stiffly, 'it is part of the duty of elders so to watch and guard young people, boys especially, as never to let them forget the restraints of duty!'

'A very effectual way, madam,' replied Mr. Talbot pleasantly, 'to make them equally detest duty and their elders, I should say.'

Considered mistaken again! It was too much for Miss Lawrence. She arose and curtseyed to her stranger guest: 'I will leave you to discuss the principles of influential intercourse with my brother, sir. For my own part, the difficulties of practice are quite enough to exercise my woman's wit!' and she swept by him, stately enough. Mr. Talbot was so taken by surprise, that he scarcely recollected himself in time to open the door for her and

'bow her out.' This was just the opportunity he required. Drawing his chair closer to the invalid, he pulled out Edward's letter, and began at once.

'The truth is, sir, I came on a purpose for which I owe you apology. But this piteous letter must be my excuse. There are passages in it which led me to conceive that you might be as perplexed as the boys themselves how to set matters right. And I was so pleased with the little I saw of your nephews, that I came, in my wife's name and my own, to offer to take them into our house until they could go to school. I can give you references as to who I am. I thought perhaps such an arrangement, failing the far better one of their remaining here happily, might be a comfort to all parties. Will you read this letter, Mr. Lawrence? It struck me as a very nice one, simply expressed, and with good feeling.'

Mr. Lawrence read it through twice. He looked sadly pained as he returned it; but he replied:

'Indeed, Mr. Talbot, I cannot thank you enough for your kindness. You have indeed acted the part of a true friend to both me and these poor boys. You can see, sir, that I am of no use to them; and my poor sister knows even less of

boys than I do. What she is to me, no words can tell. For forty long years and more she has been my constant, my untiring nurse and comforter. She gave up her youth: she gave up more—an attachment, a most desirable settlement in life, to devote herself to me, miserable cripple that I am! I never knew of it till years after,—till the battle had been fought and won, and the result was past recall, or, I need scarcely say, the sacrifice should not have been made. But now she does not understand these boys, and I see her, with the utmost pain, displeased and annoyed; whilst they, poor little fellows, are looking wretched—looking like prisoners more than guests. They have no fitting companions here, sir; yet I should be loth to part with them, if it could be helped, for my brother's sake.'

'It is a beautiful place for them, and more healthy than a town. What is the matter, if I may ask?'

'Well, sir, have you seen them yet?'

'No, I came straight to the house. This is the only communication I have had with them—this letter. I am not aware that they know I am here.'

'Then, sir, I will impose this more on your good-

nature. This is Wednesday: you need not be at home until Sunday; for which if you start on Saturday, you will be in time. You must spend to-morrow and Friday with us; and if you can strike out any plan by which the boys can remain and be happy here, I shall be for ever grateful to you. If not, they shall accept your invitation, and return with you.'

Mr. Talbot consented to this plan, after a moment's consideration. He did not feel sure how far the sister might approve. But the plan was too good to be rejected needlessly, and he consented.

'Can I see the boys?' he asked.

Mr. Lawrence touched a spring-bell by his side, and desired them to be summoned. In they came, shyly and fearfully; but the moment their eyes caught sight of Mr. Talbot, such rays of life and joy beamed therein, and such exclamations of rapture burst from all three boys, that he felt inexpressibly thankful that he had acted upon his wife's suggestion, and come without delay. But these expressions of pleasure told but too plainly how severe had been their constraint beforehand.

'Well, young men! so here I am—come at your summons; and your kind uncle says that I am to

stay until Friday night. So now be quick, and out with all your troubles.'

The boys looked aghast from him to their uncle, wondering how *he* would take this information. But he pressed little Tommy, who stood nearest to him, fondly to himself, and replied to their inquiring looks:

'Mr. Talbot has kindly come, in answer to your letter, Edward, to see if he can make us understand each other better. We have all the will, my dear boys, to make this such a home as your father and mother would wish for you. You must be patient with your old uncle and aunt, if they do not understand *how*, so well as your own dear parents.'

Oh, how horribly naughty the boys did feel ! though no one blamed them, and no one had cause. They clustered round their uncle's chair. Tommy gave him a hearty kiss, and Edward exclaimed :

'Uncle! uncle! we said you were very kind ; and so you are, and aunt too,' he added in a more doubting tone. 'But it was all so crooked, and we thought Mr. Talbot would put it right.'

'Well now, come, for the grievances!' said the latter gentleman. 'Why on earth can't you play ? I never heard of such a difficulty with boys before !'

'We have no place,' said Richard.

'No place!' said Mr. Talbot, looking out of the window.

'We must not dirt our clothes.'

'Not your best; of course not. You were never allowed to do that, were you? Because that is waste. But have you no old ones—common ones?'

'Yes, but aunt does not like our common clothes. She likes to see us always nicely dressed, and *clean*.'

'Clean! Oh, poor boys! we must ask aunt to let old clothes be worn in play-hours and back premises. I daresay she will, if you, on your parts, try to keep clean at proper hours.'

'Yes, that we will! But where can we play?'

'Is there no place anywhere—indoors or out?'

'We have our room—an awfully jolly place! We made our own rooms in it once, and rode on the beam; but everything was put tidy, and we dare not rummage it again.'

'Who put it tidy, do you know?' said their uncle.

'No, uncle, we don't know a bit; but we suppose Robins or Matilda did it.'

'I will speak to Mrs. Robins. I have no doubt you may make rooms in it again, if you like. As for riding on the beam, I don't know: you must

not break your necks. Mr. Talbot had better see it, I think.'

'And may we make a noise—plenty of noise?' inquired Tommy timidly, taking advantage of his cosy position on his uncle's lap.

'Ask Mrs. Robins and Aunt Mary. I say yes!' replied their uncle, stroking the boy's head.

'Then about climbing trees?' inquired Mr. Talbot.

'Edward, you can take Mr. Talbot to the trees, and he can judge better for you than we can. But you must remember that we are bound to give you up safe and sound to papa when he comes home, without any arms or legs wanting.'

'Suppose we go and see at once,' said Mr. Talbot, observing that Mr. Lawrence was getting tired. And he arose, remarking as he did so, 'You will make my apologies to Miss Lawrence, sir, for accepting your hospitality? I hope it will not be disagreeable to her.'

'I will, Mr. Talbot,' answered the latter gentleman. He could make no reply to the last remark, feeling very doubtful how far his sister would approve of their guest's presence.

But as Edward was leaving the room, it might be observed that he lingered behind the other three.

Some great determination was evidently rising in his mind. And before he got quite out of the room he dashed back and sprang to his uncle's chair.

'Uncle, may I show him the island ?'

'The island, my boy ! How can you get at it ?'

'If we can, may we try, uncle ? If Mr. Talbot thinks it safe ? If we could only build a house there !'

'Edward,' said his uncle gravely, 'you may ask Mr. Talbot any question you please ; and if he thinks it all safe and fit, we will let you do it, if possible. But, my dear boy, you must have some feeling for us, and not run any foolish risks. It would be so sad to have you ill or seriously injured, whilst your parents are absent. We must try and understand each other better, Edward.'

'Yes, uncle ; I have not been very wrong, have I ?'

'No, indeed. I think quite the contrary. I should say you had been good boys ; and Mr. Talbot's coming will be a comfort to us all, I hope and expect. Good-bye. Dick will get all the talk if you don't go.'

And Edward gave his uncle a grateful kiss (he was only eleven, and had never been a schoolboy !) and ran happily off.



CHAPTER VII.

THIS AWKWARD VISIT.

BUT his uncle's cogitations were not so bright as the chatter passing between the boys and Mr. Talbot.

He had acted on his own responsibility, in a manner sufficiently grave to render thoughtful a more independent member of the household than he had ever been. He had invited a guest, unwelcome, he feared, to his sister; he had listened to complaints, and given permission for acts, contrary to all existing arrangements. He thought and thought; but ended by summoning Robins, and asking if his sister were within. Miss Lawrence was not. She had gone on a visit to a sick person at some distance, to walk off the complication of annoyances that beset her path. Mrs. Robins obeyed the summons. To her, Mr. Lawrence showed

Edward's letter, which, as the reader will easily imagine, did not much surprise her. And he repeated to her the chief part of the conversation just passed between himself and Mr. Talbot. She felt unspeakably relieved, and rejoiced. It was almost exactly what she had wished to say herself, without knowing how to begin. She now added her own very sensible suggestions, that 'if Miss Lawrence' did not mind, Peggy the housemaid might wait on the boys. She was a strong sturdy girl, much more fitted for the purpose than Matilda Letitia; and that James, or some other steady man, might be allowed to assist them in any scheme out of doors on which they should set their mind; finally, that a man called Ralph, a sort of carpentering man-of-all-work, should be chosen for the purpose, 'if Miss Lawrence agreed.' He was perfectly steady, not belonging exactly to any department, handy enough for the purpose, and of an inimitable temper, that had never been known to be put out. He could watch the boys, as much as was required, and no more, because he had always work in hand;—odd jobs, to be sure, but still jobs that were wanted in time to be finished.

Robins departed, leaving her master much

happier, though still dreading greatly the interview with his sister.

However, fortune favoured him. Mr. Talbot's excursion with the boys had been a perfect success. He entered into all their plans and innumerable desires, as if he had been a boy himself; but he shook the lads off, as he observed his unconscious hostess approaching.

'Go away, boys, and let me speak to Miss Lawrence alone. You have got me into the queerest position that ever man was in, with your piteous letter—you must leave me to make my peace by myself. And MIND, you are as sober as ever, till you have leave to be otherwise. Now be off with you!'

Thus left to himself, Mr. Talbot courteously approached Miss Lawrence, and commencing with some deserved remarks on the loveliness of her garden, he soon drew her on to speak fully on this subject, next her brother, the nearest to her heart. He was a horticulturist himself of no mean pretensions, and could give as much information as he gathered from her. They passed an hour, therefore, of great mutual pleasure. During which he made an opportunity for detailing enough of his

family history to assure her of his respectability, had she doubted it. Perhaps it assured her of something beyond; certainly at the end of their walk she was surprisingly gracious and cordial in confirming her brother's invitation, which Mr. Talbot, with apologies for having pre-accepted it, then announced to her. So the ice was somewhat broken for the trembling invalid indoors.

'Brother,' began Miss Lawrence, as she ushered her guest in,—'Brother, Mr. Talbot has kindly consented to pay us a few days' visit. I believe you asked him? I am very happy to second the invitation. Have you had your soup, brother?'

'Yes,' replied he, 'and a long conversation with Robins besides. About which I wish to speak to you, sister.'

'By and by,' she answered hurriedly. 'I will divest myself of my out-door wraps first. Mr. Talbot, I will send the servant to conduct you to your room in a few minutes. You can make use of my brother's dressing-room opposite, if you require any change of shoes or other garments in the meantime. Luncheon is at one;' and Miss Lawrence left the room.

'She thinks I have been speaking to Robins

about your comfort, my dear sir,' said Mr. Lawrence with a sigh, 'and I am ashamed to say, I have never thought of it! I do not know what she will say when she finds that I have been altering her plans. She has been mistress here for forty years —she will never know how to abdicate!'

'Nor need she at all,' exclaimed Mr. Talbot. 'Indeed, it would be most unfitting that she should. Probably she will approve of all that you have done. Have you changed much, may I ask?'

'No, no; only Robins thinks a workman out of doors, and a sort of under-housemaid within, would be better attendants on the boys than her dainty niece, my sister's maid, Matilda Letitia.'

'That name does *not* sound suitable for a boys' maid!'

'No; and she just fits her name, so to speak. Those young monkeys led her a tremendous dance the other day, by way of a walk. It is the only regular piece of rebellion they have been guilty of, except refusing to say their hymns last Sunday.'

'Which reminded them of their parents. You could not much wonder at their refusal. I have seen all their objects of desire— But here comes your sister.'

'Tell her, tell her; it is by far the best plan.'

But this was much more easily said than done. Mr. Talbot did not feel at all master of his position. He certainly thought the boys' idea of amusing themselves on the island a feasible and good idea. He had also carefully examined the trees in the avenue, and had chosen several, in his own mind, which he thought they might well climb. He had not been to their room, because, unallowed by the lady of the house, he did not feel justified in accepting their eager invitation; but he could not see any reason why the boys should not be perfectly happy at The Refuge, if Miss Lawrence were *persuadable*. It was just this point that he doubted, and he felt that a little failure in tact on his part might mar all!

She came in smiling brightly enough. She had seen Robins, and given directions about the stranger's room and comfort. Robins had evidently made no allusion to the conversation she had had with her master; and Miss Lawrence had therefore returned to the parlour all unconscious of the daring invasion that had been made on her house and rule. A glance at the invalid convinced Mr. Talbot that on himself must fall the burden of explanation, if it was to be effected with any success.

For a few minutes Miss Lawrence led the conversation her own way,—to her flowers, and to the pleasant walk she had had in the garden with her guest. At length he ventured on an excursion in his direction.

'I had an agreeable walk also, before I met you, with your three pleasing nephews. They took me along a beautiful avenue of trees. The view was most charming, but I am afraid the boys saw little of it. The trees occupied their attention, and I am sure I was not surprised. I should have delighted in such at their age, such splendid trees for climbing!'

Mr. Lawrence was nervously watching his sister. His own fear for the boys' safety had become quite absorbed by his dread of her displeasure. She did, indeed, draw herself up slightly during this speech, and remarked at its conclusion—

'Climbing is not to be encouraged, I think! It is both wasteful and unsafe.'

'Scarcely unsafe! Do you think so? Of course some risk there must be; but this is better than a chance of making muffs and mollies of boys. They get so utterly quizzed at school if they are that!'

He saw that he had struck a note of alarm that

had never yet reached Miss Lawrence's ears! He continued—

‘Some of those trees are perfectly safe,—of course some are not; but at least eight or a dozen seem made for the boys. I think if the lads had some rough garments that they could not harm, I could direct them in choosing their trees during the stay that you have so hospitably offered me, Miss Lawrence. Edward tells me that their father taught them to climb, and liked them to be bold climbers. He once gave a prize for swarming up a rope, and Richard won it.’

‘The boys might try whilst Mr. Talbot is here, sister?’

‘And when he is gone they will be always climbing, brother.’

‘Perhaps,’ suggested Mr. Talbot, ‘it would relieve you of your charge a little, and give you more freedom and less responsibility, if some steady man could be told to be, in a measure, on the watch for them?’

The suggestion was tenderly offered; but it was not rejected. Miss Lawrence, ere long, began to talk over the people on the estate, and gradually, by imperceptible degrees, her brother led her to fix

on Ralph as their guardian. Mr. Talbot dexterously added that he would point out the safe trees to him, and that Ralph and the boys would be able to pick out others in time.

But this was too much. The eight or a dozen might be shown now, but no right of private judgment was to be allowed for the future. Mr. Talbot had a great mind to propose this right being left to Miss Lawrence herself, but he dared not venture on so bold a jest.

He was considering how to take his next step, when the lady herself began. She said, that she had been considering the wisdom of supplanting Matilda Letitia by a rougher, stronger woman, and that she intended to speak to Robins about it ; she did not wish Robins herself to wait on them. A little more discussion led to Peggy being fixed upon. This settled, Mr. Talbot began again :

‘What do you do with the boys on a thoroughly wet day? you can’t keep them indoors, they will make noise enough to stun you.’

‘Their room is a long way off. They are at liberty to do as they please there ; we cannot hear them,’ said their aunt.

‘Could not be better,’ thought their friend. ‘Or,’

he added aloud, ‘you have some capital linhay s and outhouses ; and that island in the stream, it is the very place for boys !’

‘They can play in the outhouses as much as they like ; Ralph is always about there. But the island in the stream, Mr. Talbot ! what can you be thinking of ?’

He laughed : ‘Thinking with the boys’ thoughts, perhaps ! Are there any buildings on it ? I have set my heart on going over to see. It would be a beautiful spot for rock plants, Miss Lawrence !’

‘I dare to say I shall remain on this side of the water, Mr. Talbot ! but if you like to make your way over, I am sure I have no objection ! We have no boat though, or only a very old one—broken to pieces, I fear.’

‘And *will* you trust the boys to me, for these two days ? I will promise to keep them safe.’

Brother and sister looked at each other. Then Miss Lawrence graciously said—

‘I think, according to the old proverb, “Birds of a feather may flock together,” we may trust Mr. Talbot with our nephews. I much doubt whether they are more youthful than he is !’

Mr. Talbot bowed his thanks. He was really

pleased. Of course, all difficulties were not smoothed over yet, but an immense advance had been made, and the rest of the way might be pursued at a future time. He completely turned the subject, entertaining his host and hostess with a long and animated description of his visits to foreign countries, or by discussing subjects of keen interest to them, with all the spirit and judgment which was natural to him as a clever, cultivated, good man. He was supremely delighted at the success of his mission so far.

But if he was delighted, it may be conceived, if possible, what was the boys' rapture at learning after luncheon that their friend was to take them out, (not Matilda Letitia !) and see what they might do.

'He is a very fairy for doing!' exclaimed Edward; 'who could have thought it possible?'

'He is almost as good as papa!' cried little Tommy.

'Don't wait talking,' exclaimed Richard, 'but come and get into our corduroys,—make haste, make haste,—he will let us do everything I know.'

And the boys rushed up-stairs. They were busy dressing, with an immense amount of chatter and bustle, when a knock at the door suddenly startled

them. *Could* it be aunt, or any other disapproving authority! Not aunt, certainly ; it must be an extreme case that would bring her up there—who then? ‘Come in,’ they said doubtingly, and in walked Mr. Talbot.

What a cry of joy greeted him!

‘Come to see the room, boys, and the beam, and the houses. Come, show them me !’

‘Here then,’ cried Richard, pushing about his bed with the same vehemence he had used on a former occasion ; with one shoe and sock off and one on, in trousers and shirt, and bright red braces, Edward flew to his assistance ; whilst Tommy, who had not yet emerged from his best garments, came shuffling to help, but Mr. Talbot stopped him.

‘Go back, you sir, and change your trousers : you must all mind rules, boys,’ he said, ‘or your present liberty will be stopped again. But this is not the best motive to give you ; you must mind them, or you will pain a very kind aunt and uncle. There are not many who would so readily make the best of so bothering a bargain as three rum animals like you! Now I am going to tell you a story,—at least I am going to try, and I believe it is a true one.’

The boys gathered round him, as he seated himself on the foot of one of the beds.

'It can't be mamma's story about Rumpelstillskin, because that's not true!' remarked Tommy, *sotto voce*, 'only very nice.'

'Rumpelstillskin! he's no acquaintance of mine! No; now listen. Once upon a time, there was a boy, something like you, longing to enjoy a good game of play; wishing to have pleasant fellows round him, one who would have liked to climb trees, and run, and jump, and frisk.'

'Why didn't he?' inquired Richard in surprise.

'Ay, there's the rub! Why didn't he? Because it had pleased God Almighty to give him legs that he could scarcely move, and that could not hold him up. So this poor young fellow had to sit in a chair—not one month, nor two months, not even one year, nor two years, but his whole life. He had to watch other boys play; he had to let them go to school, and he remain alone behind; just as you might see a lot of fellows start off for a jolly sail, and you be left alone on the beach. Nor was this boy only alone; he was in pain—sometimes more, sometimes less, but always in pain.'

'Time went on,' continued Mr. Talbot, 'and this

young lad grew to man's estate ; but he could never marry, never have children of his own, never do much work in the world, as men, who are men, like to do. He had only to sit still in his chair, and bear his loneliness and pain, and WAIT, until it should please God to take him home, and give him freedom and ease.'

Mr. Talbot paused. Nor did the boys speak. They were listening open-mouthed to the tale.

' My soul, wait thou *still* upon God, for of Him cometh thy salvation ! ' murmured the good man to himself. ' Well, boys,' he continued in a louder tone, recollecting them, ' he would have lived and died alone ; but an angel came to help him—not a real angel, but a woman—a woman indeed. And she came young, and bright, and well taught ; she came to devote herself to him. Another man implored her to be his wife. He promised her a pretty home, and love, and a happy life, as far as man might see ; and this woman would have liked —oh, so much!—to have gone with him. But she turned away instead, and took her place by the chair. There, for forty years, she stayed, nursing, guarding, comforting, cheering this poor sufferer, who, but for her, would have been alone and miser-

able. Now, boys, will you not try to please your aunt and uncle, and be careful not to jar or vex either of them ?'

'Oh, Mr. Talbot !' exclaimed Richard, who was the only one who had a tongue just then. 'Yes ; I am sure we will.'

'So am I,' said Mr. Talbot. '*Now*, you lazy things,' cried he, 'just look at the time. We shall never get over to the island to-day. Tommy, get out of those trousers, will you ? You are sticking to them like a leech !'

'It is all your fault, Mr. Talbot,' screamed Tommy, starting away, and struggling to kick off his best 'knickers.' 'You have been talking all this time.'

'I won't say another word. — — How about this beam ?' he began again a minute after.

'Now !' cried the boys with a shout of laughter.

'Why, Tommy's out of those endless 'bockers !'

'The beam is all right ; we can climb it beautifully,' said Richard, 'when that chest of drawers stands there.'

'I doubt the safety of it, though,' replied their friend. 'I don't believe the chest is steady enough. It will be better for you to climb up by a rope, I

think ; but I will see about it to-morrow. You have leave to arrange the room as you like. You do so to-night, and let me look at it to-morrow. But don't get on the beam until I have seen it. Now, I am going to change my dress, and we must meet in the avenue in ten minutes.'

Mr. Talbot left the boys, having directed them to fold up their garments as tidily as they could. A great task for the little lads, but one that, under their peculiar circumstances, Mr. Talbot judged it best to impose upon them. The boys obeyed with the utmost alacrity, and in ten minutes the party found themselves in the avenue, ready for anything.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESULT OF TACT.

Twas a beautiful afternoon. Three hours remained before the six o'clock dinner—time enough for much enjoyment; and well did Mr. Talbot and his young companions contrive to fill it. They hurried off to the carpenter's shop in the yard, without losing time in the avenue. The yard was situated close to the river; it was in fact bordered by the stream which ran past a sort of rough quay built along the bank, as far as the yard extended. The river was much used as a highway for all the farms along its course. Its stream was so sluggish, that barges could ply upon it with perfect safety, and deposit or take in their cargoes alongside the wharves that each farm possessed on the banks. Round this yard stood the linhays, etc., that were to form the boys' play-

place on a wet day. The carpenter's shop was one of the outhouses ; and in it Ralph was almost always to be found engaged in making or mending the various implements and fences used on the estate. Ralph had received orders to be at the boys' command when they really wanted him, and to keep an eye upon them at all times, whenever they happened to be out of doors. He was therefore prepared for the irruption of Mr. Talbot and his companions, and received them with a merry smile.

'We want to get over to the island,' explained the clergyman. 'Have you a boat or anything that we can go in ? Is the water deep ?'

'No, sir, quite shallow. But we've no boat ; the old one is broken up for firewood. We've tubs and barrels, sir !'

'Let me see them. They will do if they are big enough. What do you say, boys, to paddling over in tubs ?'

Say ! what might the boys be supposed to say, but express the utmost satisfaction and delight at the prospect ? Ralph therefore laid down his tools, and conducted the party to a large outhouse near the river, where reposed, piled up and piled up, a great many barrels and casks, with boards, staves,

and other rubbish. Mr. Talbot poked about among these for some time, and at last he picked out four casks of different sizes. They were old meal casks, over four feet in height. They did not satisfy him; but as no others more suitable were to be seen, he stood looking at these, as if considering how to fit them for his purpose.

'They are too high,' said Edward, 'we should tip them over; and Tommy would be lost in his.'

'I think we must saw them in halves,' replied Mr. Talbot; 'only then, they will be too shallow. I am rather puzzled.'

'I'll go to sea and try!' shouted Dick, rolling the biggest of the lot towards the river, and bounding after it.

'You'll do no such thing,' exclaimed Mr. Talbot, springing across his path, and seizing him by the collar. 'A pretty thing for me, to send my most careless charge out to sea in a thing like that, before I have tried it! Go back, Richard, and look where the tub is gone!'

Richard shook himself, by no means pleased at being thus stopped, nor at being called the most careless of the three.

'Well! Mr. Talbot, you will lose it, you know.

I could have managed it well enough, if you would have let me.'

'I daresay you might; but you might just as likely, or more likely, have been overturned, and not only soaked through and through, but have soaked half of us in saving you. Then what trust would your uncle or aunt have had in me for the future? Boy, you must be thoughtful, or I must give up helping you.'

'What do you mean to do, Mr. Talbot, yourself?' inquired Richard, only half convinced.

'What would you do, Edward?' repeated the gentleman, passing on the question.

'Saw these two in half first,' answered the boy, popping up out of a cask, which he had been examining. 'They will be deep enough then, and we can manage them, which I am sure we cannot now.'

'I don't think I would saw them in the middle, would you? Tommy and I would ill share a cask between us.'

'No, try a little out of the half,' replied Edward.

'Then, Ralph, have you more saws than one? I will saw for Tommy and myself, and one of you boys for both.'

'I'll begin!' cried Richard eagerly.

'Very well ; I'll help when you are tired !' returned his brother.

'Tired ! I shall never be tired !' and Richard seized the smallest of the two saws, which Ralph now brought up.

He and Mr. Talbot pulled off their jackets, and began working vigorously. Tom seated himself close to Mr. Talbot, to watch the detachment of his own half barrel ; but Edward, after watching the party for a few moments, left them for another part of the yard. Richard toiled and moiled with desperate energy for some minutes, but it was a severe task, and ere-long he was obliged to rest, with but a little of the severance between the two ends completed. Mr. Talbot took no notice, but continued his own slower but steadier labour. Tommy could not help. Edward was not in sight, so Richard began again furiously. About half an hour was passed in this manner ; Richard was getting dreadfully tired, and aggrieved, that Edward had not appeared. Mr. Talbot, too, though he said nothing, was beginning to wonder ; when Edward reappeared, with a shout of triumph, rolling the truant cask before him.

'Oh ! I have had such trouble !' he exclaimed, as

he neared the group with his bulky companion.
‘I really thought I must have given it up.’

‘Where did you find it? What have you done?’
inquired more voices than one.

‘I saw that it had floated away to those railings,’
replied Edward, ‘and I thought if I could get along
the wall by them, I might roll it back; so I crept
carefully on, until I caught hold of the cask, and
with immense trouble I pulled it along. I have
landed it, and here it is!’

‘It was well you did not ask leave first!’ muttered
Dick, half aloud. ‘I could have done just as well,
if I had been allowed to try. Now, Ted, come and
saw, for I am nearly dead; I have been working
like a horse ever since you left.’

Ted threw off his jacket merrily enough, and
began his task. Dick had finished about one
quarter of the work, which was really severe for
such young unpractised hands. But Mr. Talbot
had nearly got into the second half of his, and
Tommy was eagerly anticipating its conclusion, and
the possession of his half barrel. It was Richard’s
turn now to roam away; whilst for several minutes
the sawing went on unceasingly and silently. At
length both workmen stopped at once.

‘Oh !’ cried Mr. Talbot, stretching himself.

‘I say !’ echoed Ted, following his example.

‘If any one had told me, this day last week, that I should now be here, breaking my back over barrels, I should have told them to *go along* with their nonsense.’

‘Yes ! but it’s very good fun, Mr. Talbot,’ said little Tommy, laughing.

‘Very ! Sir Do-nothing ! to those who sit by and look on ! but what to you and me, Edward ?’

‘Tommy would work if he could,’ said his brother, observing the colour rising in the little fellow’s face at Mr. Talbot’s words. ‘He is not strong enough to do this work.’

‘No, no, of course not. He must pitch the boats by and by, when we are ready for it.’

‘He might make up some fire for the pitch-pot now ?’ suggested Edward. ‘See for some safe place, Tommy.’

And Tommy, delighted with the order, hurried away. He had soon collected a large heap of sticks, chips, and shavings, which he piled up in the usual corner for the pitch-pot to hang. He examined the pot itself, but it was too heavy for him to manage it ; so he left it, and began to

scramble upon the rubbish out of which the tubs had been taken. It had struck him that something in the way of oars would be required ; and as he sat perched high up on the mass, and gazed down upon the two indefatigable sawyers below, it further struck him that the tubs, with the help of a plank or two, would make rather decent-looking canoes. Then, if so, not oars, but paddles would be required to propel them. He looked about, therefore, for wood shaped like paddles ; and at length succeeded in finding some, which he detached from the rest at the expense of considerable tugging, and safely conveyed to the ground.

‘Oars ! paddles more like,’ exclaimed Mr. Talbot, as Tommy dragged his wood closer, saying what it was for.

‘Those will make very good canoes,’ replied Tommy.

‘I see !’ cried Edward. ‘So they will, and be much safer. Look ! Mr. Talbot, a short, narrow plank here on each side, and cross planks coming to a point before and behind ; nothing can be better.’

‘And how to fasten them all together ?’ inquired the clergyman, resting on his saw, and contemplating his tub. ‘I see ; you need not tell me, Edward ;

with short poles underneath ; a capital plan. Then, Tommy, go and ask Ralph for a small saw and some poles. Stay ! ask him to come here himself ;' as Tommy ran off.

Ralph soon returned, and highly approved of the suggestion. He volunteered to assist in shaping the planks ; and he produced a saw that Tommy could use, with some poles that he might cut into lengths, about which Tommy set to work at once.

But where was Richard all this time ? The question was full in Mr. Talbot's mind. It was considerably past the half hour of Edward's absence ; nor could he trust that thoughtless impetuous youth as Edward could be trusted. Yet he did not like to seek him. He thought Richard would be more likely to learn by experience than by lectures. He shrank, too, from spying after any boys. But as an hour was nearly gone by, he determined to rest, and follow Dick.

Before the hour was quite over, he had, however, the satisfaction of completing his task, and setting Tommy's smaller tub free from the larger half, destined for himself. Tommy pounced upon it, and bounced into it with a shout of joy. Then, with Ralph's help, he at once began to arrange

the poles and planks around and under it. Five short poles across underneath, three under the tub itself, and two just beyond, supported the boards, which flanked and formed the points of the canoe. This was the plan, but it took some time to execute. Long before even the first framework was put together, Edward had sawn his cask in half, and produced two nice tubs for himself and Richard. Without allowing himself any rest, he began at once upon the poles and boards. He hesitated for a moment whether to make his own canoe first or Richard's, but he decided on making his own, judging that Dick might prefer some peculiar plan with his ; and, moreover, being very anxious to set about his own.

'How about Mr. Talbot's, though ? Ralph, you must do his. He can't like this hard work as we do.'

'Yes, yes ! Master Edward ; I'll do his time enough. You can't take to the water, sir, to-day, you know.'

'I suppose it is too late to finish to-day ?'

'I should think so, indeed, sir !' replied Ralph. But where in the world was Richard ?

He was not, when he left his companions, in the most amiable mood in the world. He was not accustomed to be so plainly shown himself, as Mr.

Talbot had done. At home, with his parents that is, his froth and dash had often passed for spirit, or been passed over with a laugh. They had trusted so confidently to Edward, that Dick and Tommy were both less questioned and less studied than perhaps was wise,—yet both were very young. But now that the harmony of another household depended on the fitting in well of such diverse parts, it became of consequence that each should do his best to fill his own place, with as few obtrusive angles as possible. It was manifestly impossible for Edward to keep order, if either of his brothers rushed on disorder. Tommy was too young, and too self-contained and quaint, to rub much against any one; but Richard, with his daring spirit, capable as it was of becoming manly and fine, would cause disturbance enough, unless he could be induced to guide it with thoughtfulness and temper. Mr. Talbot, therefore, sought him purposely, to see what his affronted dignity had provoked him to do.

And, after a somewhat long search, he found him in a sufficiently awkward position,—namely, in the branches of a tree that stood alone in the middle of the river, some yards from the shore.

‘ Halloa! my friend,’ thought Mr. Talbot. ‘ You

can remain there for a bit ; but I wonder how you got there ?'

Mr. Talbot then lighted his cigar, and sat down to smoke it, as complacently as if he had no idea that any one was within sight. He rightly conjectured that Dick had attempted to cross to the island on some conveyance chosen suddenly, had found his attempt impossible, and had climbed the tree for a refuge, not afraid of getting wet, but afraid of the probable consequences if he should do so ; therefore, he determined to imprison him there for a while. Richard believed himself unseen, and, tired as he was of his position, he was too heartily ashamed of it to draw Mr. Talbot's attention to himself if he could help it. But Mr. Talbot had no intention of letting him off so easily. After a while, his cigar being smoked, he began looking about him : first at the view, then at the tree, and apparently just perceiving somebody there, he made a spy-glass of his hands, and then called out—

' Halloa ! you, sir. Richard ! how did you get there ? How do you mean to get back again ?'

Richard, who had withdrawn himself, as far as the tree would permit, from observation, was now obliged, disconsolately, to reply : ' I don't know, sir !

'But how did you get there? I suppose you know that,' continued his tormentor.

'I tried to push myself on a plank,' shouted the boy back, unwillingly; 'and—and it upset nearly.'

'Oh! Why did you do it?'

Richard really could not reply. He could not shout his foolish reasons back.

'How do you mean to get away, hey?—well?'

'I don't know!' screamed the boy.

'Nor I. I will go and ask Mr. Lawrence if any boat can be got.'

'No,—no, Mr. Talbot! Uncle will be so vexed, and then he will stop the others.'

'Why did not you think of that before?'

'I don't know,' repeated poor Dick.

'Well; you stay there and we'll see. You must not wade away, or all trust in me will be gone; and that would be hard, for your wisdom, you wiseacre.'

So Mr. Talbot departed, and Richard was left in his tree.

'Ralph!' inquired the gentleman, as he returned to the group of workers, 'is that water deep, too deep to wade in?'

'No, sir,' replied Ralph. 'I often wade in it, when it is not too cold.'

'Would you think it too cold to wade in now ? Master Richard is up in that tree.'

'Bless the boy !' exclaimed the man. 'He has a fine spirit, sir !'

'What is the good of that with no head to guide it, Ralph ? He must find a head here, or this house won't hold his fine spirit !'

'And that's true, sir,' replied Ralph, who had taken off his shoes and stockings, and was busily tucking up his trousers. The two boys had stopped their work in astonishment, and something very like vexation ; yet they ran, of course, to look at Dick and his rescuer, who was now busily wading towards the tree. Poor Richard ! he would rather have been 'saved' any other way than carried pick-a-back home ! But there was no help for it. Cautiously descending his tree, he deposited himself on Ralph's back, and was by him borne towards the shore. He had the sense, much as he was tempted, not to leap off until he could leap on dry land ; and he had the courtesy to turn and thank Ralph for rescuing him. But it was most unpleasant to face Mr. Talbot's cool gaze, as he asked him whether he would like to see the canoes his brothers had nearly *finished* for him and themselves, and then

added, ‘Tommy has been as useful as any one!’

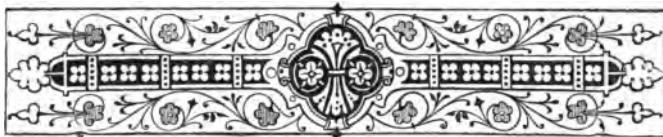
‘Only easy work that I could do,’ said Tommy; ‘we wanted you sadly, Richard.’

‘Richard’s spirit will be useful to everybody,’ observed Mr. Talbot, in a somewhat gentler tone, ‘when he has a head to guide it. At present it is like a running fire, rather than a useful blaze.’

‘I will guide it,’ said Richard earnestly.

‘Then all will be right, my boy, if you do; and it is worth spending an afternoon in a tree to find out the need. You will never forget it, when you look at that tree! But you must be quick, Dick, now, or we shall be late in; and *this* we never must be.’ ‘Edward,’ continued Mr. Talbot, as the other two ran off, ‘don’t think me hard on your brother; he must learn to guide himself, now that his parents are gone.’

Edward looked up with a bright assenting smile. But he had felt Mr. Talbot very hard, and had been much disposed to resent his blaming Dick so severely. Now he ran after his brothers, convinced and comforted; and the canoes duly admired, as far as they were finished, the whole party repaired indoors to dress for dinner.



CHAPTER IX.

A SQUADRON OF TUBS.

HE dinner passed over pleasantly enough. The elders talked, and the lads listened. It had been long since Mr. Lawrence or his sister had entertained so agreeable and congenial a companion as Mr. Talbot. He seemed able to talk well on whatever subject was started ; the true secret of which was, that he took so ready an interest in all. Before long, too, they began to discover acquaintances,—at least he knew the sons of many cotemporaries of his hosts, and could tell much that keenly interested the old people of the conduct and prospects of these sons, or of the habitations and life of their parents. The boys were scarcely less delighted than their uncle and aunt. Many a tale of school life or college life, many an anecdote of success or of right-doing, caught

their attention ; and more than once they burst into a merry laugh over some ludicrous story, told perhaps for their especial benefit. So occupied were all in listening or talking that the constitutional walk was well-nigh forgotten. Sober-grey and his donkey-chair, in fact, appeared at the windows before any one was equipped for going out. Miss Lawrence started up, and hurried away at a very unusual pace for her. The boys scampered off to get their shoes and hats, abusing the old donkey, and wishing the old walk was at Jericho.

But very soon the solemn procession had started, —a misnomer on this occasion happily, for there was little solemnity about it. The boys had been given permission to run about under the trees whilst the chair passed up and down, and their merry shouts failed to disturb even Miss Lawrence, so much was she interested in her new companion.

On the next morning, the moment breakfast was over (and the garments changed ! bother them !) the boys hurried to the yard. Ralph had not been idle ! There stood four lovely canoes, in the boys' estimation, very nearly finished. Strongly and firmly nailed together, they bid fair to be just the exact things that were wanted, and the rapture of

the boys knew no bounds. They jumped and danced round and round them, exclaiming that Ralph was the most glorious fellow, and the boats were beyond perfection.

'Shall we go to the water at once?' asked they eagerly of Mr. Talbot, who was watching their pleasure with much amusement.

'Best wait till after dinner, sir,' said Ralph. 'Then we can give these a touch of pitch underneath. It won't be dry; but it will be better than none.'

'And the paddles are not ready,' replied Mr. Talbot. 'Come, boys, we can shape them, and leave Ralph to finish these beautiful boats, for really they are capital—much better than I expected.'

'I promised Master Tommy that he should help to pitch the boats, sir, yesterday, if you have no objection? It is easier work for him than the paddles; he can begin upon yours at once, sir.'

'Well, so do. But come, Ted and Dick, we must work at the paddles; the boats must have pegs for the oars, Ralph, and they should have rings *fore* and *aft*, to tie ropes to.'

'CABLES,' said Dicky.

'Cables then!'

'Yes, sir, I have them in there,' pointing to his

workshop ; ‘but we must pitch the bottoms first, or we can’t turn the boats over. I have hooped and scrubbed the casks, sir.’

So the boats were turned over for Tommy to pitch. Who does not envy him, with that long black brush, dipping the pitch out of its pot, and daubing it in great black streaks all over the bottoms of the boats? Ralph showed him how to manage it, so as not to lay it on too thick in any one place; and to daub quickly before the pitch cooled; and, finally, to daub into the crevasses. Tommy was as happy as possible; his brothers quite envied him, for the paddles promised slow fun compared to the pitching. But on Mr. Talbot reminding them that the boats would not go off of themselves, and that his visit would be over in two days, the boys set to work hard upon their paddles. The length and shape being ascertained, the workmen began running a race against each other, which should finish first;—a race which, as Mr. Talbot engaged to make two pair of paddles against the boys’ single pairs, Dick ultimately won; a circumstance which gave him great pleasure, and his companions no less, remembering the severe mortification of the preceding evening.

But the work took a long time—so long that it became doubtful whether they could take to the water, as Ralph called it, that evening or not. The boys became very impatient as the afternoon passed away and dinner-time approached, and their boats were still bottom upwards, drying their pitch, and waiting to be turned till their paddles were ready. The boys had chafed considerably at the necessity of ‘cleaning’ themselves for the one o’clock luncheon ; and no very great wonder. But Mr. Talbot was inexorable ; and he impressed upon them so strongly the positive duty of observing their uncle and aunt’s rules, that they submitted with tolerable grace. But now that dinner and this second horrid tidiness were close at hand, they nearly broke out into open rebellion. It needed all his authority, and a very determined walk from the yard, to oblige them, like so many sulky puppies, to follow him. Again, it needed a very decided threat, that if late for dinner they should not have his company that evening, to overcome their reluctance, and bring them down in time. He walked in, pondering very seriously on these burdensome regulations, and considering whether it were possible that their virtue would stand it long, or whether

he could have sufficient influence to procure a little relaxation. If they might carry out bread and cheese at one, and be summoned in by a bell at five, not to get into a mess afterwards,—he felt this might be a compromise, if he only could effect it.

After dinner, he requested his host and hostess to excuse him for a short time during the ‘constitutional,’ since the boys had prepared a regatta. And he went with them, clothed all in their working dresses, to the yard. The paddles were done, the boats right side up, and in the water, fitted with pegs and rings and cables ; and Ralph stood there, looking on in delight. It needed but a minute, and each mariner was seated in his craft, ‘squatting in his tub,’ and the boats were instantly pushed off from the quay. They were fairly ballasted with stones, and floated extremely well, as steadily and upright as any real boat could do. Indeed it would be difficult to say who was most delighted—Mr. Talbot, Ralph, or the boys. Perhaps Mr. Talbot, because he not only felt this a great success, but because it recalled many a merry row which he and his brothers had had on a similar broad river nearer home. He watched, however, with some anxiety, the exceeding awkwardness with which his young

companions managed their oars, and the narrow escape one had of an upset (*a capsized*), from unguardedly rising to push his boat on with its pole. Each boat had a pole, as well as a pair of paddles, provided for it by Ralph's care.

Mr. Talbot paddled himself on, calling to the boys to observe how he handled his oars. Dick was the first to catch it, and, triumphantly dashing to the front, he looked back to exult over his slower brothers; but he dashed too far, even up against the railing that Edward had scrambled along when he caught the runaway cask. He came to no serious harm, but he had to back and alter his course; and it took so great an effort to push himself free, that he, too, narrowly escaped an upset. Edward and Tom at length caught the proper action; and Dick having recovered himself, and come up also, the three followed Mr. Talbot, and sweeping majestically past all obstacles, appeared before the surprised and amused gaze of Mr. and Miss Lawrence. 'Sober-grey' grinned broadly, and turned his chair, so that his master might see them well. Then, triumph of triumphs, Miss Lawrence waved her handkerchief to them!

'We will land to-morrow, shall we?' said Mr.

Talbot. ‘Suppose we row round the island to-night ; it will teach you to manage your oars better.’

The boys agreeing, away they went. It was harder work rowing back against the stream on their homeward course, but all was accomplished in safety, with no fouling or other disaster ; and the boats were safely moored by the yard for the night. Then the mariners sought the uncle and aunt for approval, and cordially received it.

‘How will you name the boats?’ asked the lady.

‘“Victory” mine,’ cried Dick.

‘“Endeavour,” I think, mine,’ said Edward.

‘“Amy” mine,’ said little Tom, almost in a whisper.

‘Mamma’s name,’ thought Edward.

‘And yours, Mr. Talbot?’ inquired Miss Lawrence.

‘Really,’ he began, ‘I scarcely know. I have not thought about it. Perhaps —’

The lady interrupted him with a smile. ‘Then I will name it for you ; it shall be the “Adroit Assistance.”’

Mr. Talbot lifted his hat in acknowledgment of the compliment, which he felt was an important one, and one that augured well for the future. The whole party shortly afterwards returned to the house.



CHAPTER X.

E X P L O R A T I O N S.

NE day more, only one! There was scarcely time to complete the work so auspiciously begun. But there was no help for it. Sunday could not be left unprovided for, and there happened just then to be a paucity of clergymen at Southampton. The inmates of The Refuge pressed Mr. Talbot earnestly to remain a little longer,—to telegraph, if writing was too slow, that Mrs. Talbot must provide a substitute for the Sunday duty. But he was obdurate. ‘No, no,’ he said, ‘my wife is not strong, and I cannot have her teased about it. Besides, I know she might hunt the place through in vain for a parson at liberty. I must go, thank you. But I will come again some day, if you will allow me, and see what has been doing since I left.’

'And bring Mrs. Talbot with you.'

'Well—yes, if you please. The change of air will do her good. Our little girl is going to stay at her aunt's in a month's time. We could come then, if that would suit you.'

'Yes,' replied Miss Lawrence. 'Any time is the same to us.'

'Then this day month, if you please?'

'Yes, for a clergyman's fortnight.'

'No, no; a clergyman's week. I cannot be longer away; indeed it is impossible. We will start on a Monday, and return on the Friday week.'

'Very well, Mr. Talbot, it shall be as you desire. But you will be welcome for as long as you like to stay.'

'You are very good,' he replied. 'I am now going to ask you another favour; I am afraid you will think me very exacting. But may the boys and I take some bread and cheese with us to-day, and absent ourselves from luncheon? We want to explore the island.'

Permission was willingly given to all but the request that bread and cheese might be carried. Miss Lawrence insisted on a much more sumptuous luncheon being provided. Then the only difficulty

was, how to get it to the island. The boats, for all their grand names, would hold little besides their rowers, and a raft would get wet. Mr. Talbot had visions of a floating barrel to be towed after them. Happily, however, the difficulty had struck Ralph already. He had therefore lashed together four fair-sized casks in such a manner as to make a tolerable boat of burden, or barge as it might be termed, only it had more height than breadth ; and into this the luncheon was placed, with a spade, hatchet, mattock, saw, etc., and finally Ralph himself, for his curiosity and excitement nearly rose as high as his young masters'.

So they all pushed off on their tremendous adventure. Mr. Talbot towed the barge, which, however, with Ralph for its inmate, managed to give very effectual assistance to its own progress. The boys rowed their boats more cleverly than on the previous evening, and in less than half an hour from starting the whole fleet arrived off the island. ' Precipitous and richly wooded was the shore, inaccessible save by one secluded sandy beach.' In simpler English, the banks of the island were rather steep, and much overgrown ; the low copse and tangled bushes extending into the water in some

places, and overhanging it in others. But in one spot a little gravelled cove offered admission to the boats; and into it they were soon pushed and paddled. Dick was the first to spring on shore, though he kissed the ground in so doing, for his boat slipped under his spring and threw him down. But, none the worse, up he sprang. ‘Welcome to the island!’ he shouted. ‘Welcome to the island!’

‘And your boat—look at it!’ cried Mr. Talbot, as the ‘Victory,’ surging under his leap, was calmly floating off.

‘Oh! catch it—catch it!’ cried Dick.

‘Don’t you wish you may get it?’ returned Mr. Talbot, laughing, but throwing him the ‘cable,’ which he had caught as the boat ‘bumped’ him. ‘There you are; but you’d best look after yourself another time.’

‘Still here we all are. Hurrah! hurrah!’ and one boy after another leapt happily to land, all eagerness to explore the place. But Mr. Talbot would not let them stir from the spot, until a safe place had been found for the boats. They had not far to seek: a sharp spur of rock jutting out into the water gave depth enough by its side for the boats to float in safety; and some trees close by

served for posts by which to moor them. This done, the luncheon was taken out and safely sheltered under some bushes, the tools being laid by it ; and so the party were at liberty to explore as much as they pleased.

The island was about the size of a small field, but it was so diversified by rock, and hill, and path, and little lawns, that it seemed much larger. It was also so overgrown with tangled brushwood, brambles, etc., that it was not visible in its full extent at any point. Mr. Talbot had carefully inspected its shore, as they passed round it on the preceding evening, to see if anywhere it was steep enough to be dangerous. But in all directions it sloped into the water, except on one side, where however, though the rock was rather high, the shore below was wooded enough to prevent any danger beyond that of a prickly fall. For though the island was steep by comparison with the flat country around, it was in no place much above sixty feet in actual height, and nowhere a sixth of that in sheer descent.

‘Now, which way are we to go?’ inquired Mr. Talbot.

‘Here is something like a path,’ replied Edward, ‘running up this bank ; but it is so overgrown.’

'We'll soon clear that,' exclaimed Richard, making a vehement onslaught on the tangled brambles.

'Best let me, sir,' cried Ralph. 'I've got a hatchet.'

Dick withdrew, not a little pricked; but, nothing daunted, he followed close behind Ralph, removing the rubbish from the path, as the other cut it down.

They had evidently lit upon an old path up the hill: it wound up for some yards, and then opened on a little green spot, nearly shut in by trees, and sadly overgrown, but still extremely pretty.

'Here we'll lunch,' cried Mr. Talbot.

'Not yet,' exclaimed the boys; 'the path still goes on up the hill.'

'Oh no, not yet,' replied the gentleman, half amused and half ashamed at having been the first to speak of eating. 'We will go on, boys; it is not eleven yet.'

They continued their course, cutting their way still upward, until they reached a spot where the path was really rocky and in steps, and not nearly so overgrown. They climbed speedily to the top, where on this side a good sharp rock rose boldly into the air. A small platform of moss and grass was on its summit. Richard, who had not re-

linquished his post of clearer to Ralph, attained this first, by springing past his forerunner, and dashing on with a shout of joy.

'I'll build a castle here!' he cried; 'and then I'll defend it against all my enemies. My castle shall be of stone. Look! there is a quarry just under of fine stones. And I will ride out from it under its gateway on my horse, and come down to take care of all you people in the village below. I will be the baron,—the Red Cross Knight,—and you shall be the burghers.'

'And what are you going to ride on?' inquired some one.

'On my noble charger. He shall be black, with a long sweeping tail; and my armour shall be—'

'But how are you to get your horse here? He will never bear the tubs.'

Richard thought a minute. 'I must have the donkey, and make-believe it's a horse,' said he. 'Tibbs is not drawing turnips always, is he, Ralph?'

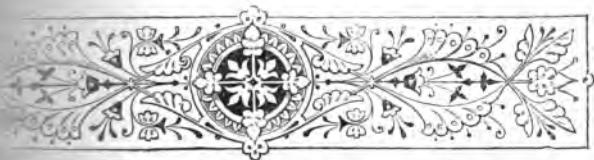
'No, master,' said Ralph, laughing. 'But I doubt if he brook the tubs any better than a horse.'

'Oh! we must tie his legs together. Then, on my horse.'



"I'LL BUILD A CASTLE HERE," CRIED RICHARD.—PAGE 108.





CHAPTER XI.

DISCOVERIES AND SCHEMES.

Y the end of which time, Richard and Edward had begun to wonder whither their companions had wandered, and Mr. Talbot would wake. They had not long waited on either score, for Tommy and Ralph came up the path just as Mr. Talbot lifted his head. The two former—Tommy in particular—were in high spirits. They had been down to the old place, whence they had carried up the stones to the green. They had cleared a fair space there, and had done a little exploring. Now they came to tell the results. They gathered round them the two brothers and Mr. Talbot, and began his tale. They had found an old summer-house in the

wood by the green—a wooden summer-house, all tumbling in. And we have found the grave of a dog, with a gravestone, and a dog carved on it. And we have found what was a garden,' he exclaimed. 'There are old flowers growing there still—some iris, and some sweet-william, and some wall-flowers, and one or two rose-bushes. And the beds were edged with shells,—there are some left still; and the little tiny walks had gravel on them. But they are all overgrown, and it is all in a rummage. I should so like to clear it.'

'And I should like to rebuild the summer-house,' cried Edward. 'We might make that the castle, Richard.'

'EDWARD!' exclaimed the latter individual, 'a castle down there, with this commanding height above! Why, the enemy would get up here and shoot down.'

'The enemy could be make-believe too,' suggested Edward.

'No, no,' said Mr. Talbot. 'Dick is right. This is the site for the castle, without a doubt. But here is work cut out for all three of you. Let Tommy take the garden: when he has got it to rights, very likely his aunt will help him to stock

it ; she understands flowers so well. You, Edward, take charge of the summer-house, and rebuild it ; you like carpentering. And you, Dick, manage this castle, if you can. But you have undertaken an immense task,' added Mr. Talbot—' one beyond your powers, I am afraid. Then let Ralph help any of you that want help. But I do not know how much time he may give you.'

'About an hour or two now and then, I reckon,' replied Ralph. 'I mustn't let Mr. Lawrence's work go behind.'

'No, certainly not. But come, boys, I want to see these discoveries of Tom's ; and it is past twelve, and I do want my luncheon, however shocked you may be.'

But the boys were hungry enough by this time ; and down the whole party trooped to the green. There the baskets stood, under the largest tree. It was an oak with high roots, and a mossy bank about them. On this the explorers seated themselves—at least Mr. Talbot did—whilst Ralph and the boys busied themselves with unpacking and bringing to him the good provender that the aunt's care had put up for them. This done, they gathered round him to eat it.

'This seat has been partly made,' remarked Mr. Talbot, looking about him as he ate. 'Ralph, do you belong to this part of the world? Do you know who lived here before your master?'

'If you please, sir,' said Ralph, 'I'm not so old as master. But, for all that,' he added, 'I have heard that master bought the place from a family called Drummond—I think it was. He was a very rich gentleman in London, they said. But he lost all his money somehow, and had to sell the place.'

'How long ago, Ralph?'

'Master has been here nigh upon fifty years, sir. I believe Mr. Drummond had lots of children. I reckon they used to play here. But there's something written on the gravestone yonder; that will tell us all, I daresay.'

'We will go and see directly. Give me the beer, will you, Ralph, please? What are you eating?'

'Plenty, sir; thank you.'

'And you, boys?'

'Yes, thanks, lots and lots,' said they.

But the most ample luncheon cannot last for ever. This was finished at length; and only cake and bread and cheese (a little, comparatively speaking) were left to regale the party about four o'clock.

They then started for the dog's grave. In an extremely pretty spot, mossy, and shaded with trees, and by a straggling laburnum bush, lay (as we may suppose) the bones of the pet animal. His grave, or her grave rather—for the stone proclaimed her name to be 'Fanny'—was of brick, and stood about two feet high. On its top lay a stone slab of suitable size, with the effigy of a spaniel carved on it, with an inscription; and some lines also were engraved on a side-stone. The inscription, deciphered with much difficulty by the four on their knees, proved to be as follows :

IN MEMORY OF
DEAR LITTLE FANNY, THE BLACK SPANIEL,
WHO DIED MAY —.

SHE FELL A VICTIM TO THE TEETH OF TOBIAS,
THE BUTCHER'S DOG,
WHO WAS HUNG THE NEXT DAY.

THIS MONUMENT IS ERECTED BY
HER ATTACHED AND DISCONSOLATE FRIENDS.

Then followed a string of Drummonds' names, to the number of eight.

'Poor thing! I am glad Toby was hung,' said Mr. Talbot. 'Now for the lines: what are they?'

'Where are they?' said Edward; 'that's the first thing to be found out. I have been grubbing down after them ever so far, and I can't get to the end of them yet. Oh, here it comes; this flourish must be the end! Now let me see: two, four, six, eight, ten—a dozen lines, I declare! They must have been marvellously fond of Fanny.' And Edward read with much trouble the following lines:

'Here lies a faithful dog as ever
Did fawn on girl or boy;
Cruel Toby's teeth did sever
The life's cord of our joy.

We lay her here in pain and woe,
Her needless slaughter mourning.
Reader, your sympathy bestow—
Grief for a dog not scorning.

And we must leave her tomb, ere long,
For other hands to tend.
Our home is sold: we can but mourn
Our Refuge and our friend.'

'Poor children!' observed Mr. Talbot. 'It was not only the loss of the dog, but the break-up of their home, and sad misfortune, that produced these lines and the epitaph. I wonder where all those children are now!'

'They must be very old children now,' observed Dick ; whilst Ted said :

'I daresay uncle and aunt can tell. We can ask when we go in. We will clear this grave, and keep it tidy, though, for Fanny's sake, and theirs too.'

'Here is the garden,' said Tommy, who had not remained the whole time inspecting the grave. 'Will you come and look at the garden ?'

His call was obeyed. There were the remains, evidently, of a very pretty little garden, used for common flowers, that is to say ; it was scarcely suited for very choice plants to flourish in. The spot was a continuation of the green, running round towards the south. It was shaded by Dick's castle rock and the quarry bank from the east and north. There were rocks about it also, whilst a gutter on one side, with something like a basin, seemed to say that water had once trickled through it.

'You may make a lovely spot of it, Tommy,' said Mr. Talbot, looking round him. 'It will be almost wasted upon you. It would make a choice rockery.'

'Missus would never get here, sir,' observed Ralph, who had rejoined them. 'This is the place of all others for the young gentlemen, because they can do no harm, and can annoy no one.'

'You are right,' returned Mr. Talbot. 'Now for the summer-house, Edward, and then we have seen all.'

'That is round here,' said Tommy, proud of being the cicerone of the place; and he conducted them quite under some brambles to a lonesome-looking spot, where, under three fair-sized oaks, stood, or rather tumbled, the ruins of an arbour. Its honeysuckles and roses had left it in despair, and straggled up the trees for support. An old table stood therein, and a bench still remained attached to its side. But nothing more dilapidated and desolate could well be seen.

'I shall have a deal of work to put this to rights,' exclaimed Edward. 'What a ruin it is!'

'I think you must clear it a little first. In fact, if I were you boys, I should clear the paths before I did anything else, so as to see my way before me a bit. This spot ought to be connected with Tom's garden in some better manner than by that brambly passage; and I am at a loss to conceive how Dick and his charger are to penetrate anywhere, without losing his hat, or their eyes or ears. If I were you, I should clear away first, boys.'

'It would be the best plan,' replied Edward.

'Shall we begin to-morrow? But you will be gone, Mr. Talbot.'

'Yes; but that need not hinder you. You three would soon clear away the overgrowth.'

'I can't possibly help,' declared Dick. 'Consider, Mr. Talbot. You said mine was much the hardest work, and I shall never finish if I don't begin. I must dig the stones directly; indeed I must.'

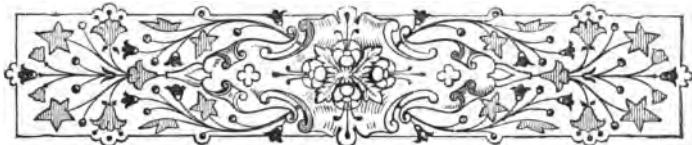
'Well,' replied Mr. Talbot, smiling, 'then let the other two clear, and you dig; or, perhaps you may be glad of a change of work some part of the day, then you can clear also.'

'No,' persisted Dick, 'I must dig all day.'

'I expect you will find it the quickest way to help each other sometimes. However, please yourselves, and learn by experience. Now shall we complete our explorations and discoveries.'

There was not much more to discover. The castle rock was on the north-east side of the island, with its quarry on the north. The landing-place was westerly, and the path, which led first to the green, then turned a little to the left up the hill, leaving the grave, the arbour, and the garden, not all on a level, to enjoy the sunny south and south-

west. The whole island was explored by three o'clock. After this, Mr. Talbot proposed a row round the island, since Ralph was quite sure he could get home in his tubs, with the lunch and tools, without the help of the other boats; which proposal was immediately and gladly accepted.



CHAPTER XII.

WET! WET!

'Merrily, merrily here we go,
Sometimes quick, and sometimes slow!'

'**H**EIGH-HO!' exclaimed Mr. Talbot as, the tubs being moored in the yard, he sprang out of his to the land. 'Boys, only just time to dress for dinner! You must be quick now—that's very certain. By the bye, I never looked at your room. Suppose you all go to bed at eight to-night, and I will just come up and look. We shall have no avenue this evening, or those clouds mean nothing. Here, boys, here comes the rain;' and a smart shower considerably hastened their return home.

'Now, Mr. Talbot, you will see what an evening in-doors is,' said Edward. 'We get grave books to read, sitting upright by the table. You shall see the books.'

The boys came down in good time for dinner, and dinner was a very different affair now that Mr. Talbot was present to talk. As soon as it was over, and the party had assembled in the drawing-room, Miss Lawrence proceeded to the bookcase to take out *the* books for her nephews, who glanced at one another and at Mr. Talbot. But that gentleman had followed her, and, taking out a huge volume, said, ‘Could the boys be trusted with this —Froissart’s *Chronicles*—profusely illustrated? It was my book of books as a boy. I think they will be careful with it.’

Miss Lawrence hesitated. ‘If they will,’ she said. ‘It is a very valuable edition.’

‘Will you promise, boys, to do your best; and to put it away, or show it to Miss Lawrence if you hurt it?’

The boys consented eagerly. The precious volume was deposited on a table, an ottoman drawn near, and as long as they were left alone they were supremely happy. But at length Mr. Talbot called them from this delightful book, to give their uncle and aunt a description of the island, and their plans. They began rather shyly at first; but the sincere interest Mr. Lawrence, in particular, showed in their

story soon loosened their tongues. Now the danger was that he would be overwhelmed with their chatter, rather than not have enough of it. But he was utterly grateful to find that they could so make a companion of him. Soon his pencil and paper came out,—for he was a good draughtsman,—and he was sketching Dick's tower that was to be, and trying to follow Edward's description of the arbour; and at last he set them off in a roar, by a most spirited caricature of Richard and his charger. His eye grew brighter, and his manner more animated than his sister had seen for years. But at length he began to show symptoms of fatigue. Then Mr. Talbot and Miss Lawrence both warned the young men away. The clock was striking eight, and off they went to bed, reluctant at first to leave their merry talk, but willing enough when they remembered that Mr. Talbot was to follow. He went, indeed, with them. But he would not approve of the beam as a plaything, until he had had more time to see about it. He would be back, he said, in a month, and that would be time enough both for the beam and the trees in the avenue. There were two or three very fair trees on the island, and he thought they had better confine themselves to

them, or the linhays and carpenter's shop, leaving other things till his return. He then wished the boys good-night, and returned to the drawing-room.

Here he was received with heartfelt thanks by both his host and hostess. 'You have not only thought so wisely for the boys, but so kindly for us,' Mr. Lawrence said; and his sister echoed his words, adding, that if there were any recommendations he wished to offer, she would listen to them. So he seized the opportunity to speak of the luncheon, either out of doors or in the servants' hall, with the summons of the bell at dinner-time, and gained his point.

About the hymns, also, Miss Lawrence consulted him,—when he gave it as his decided opinion that she had better attempt nothing of the sort, with their parents' memory so fresh in their minds. But he offered to send some books for the spare time before and after the services on Sunday; and for every-day amusement also, if they wished, which the boys could listen to, or read, as might be convenient. Thus, apparently, the last of the grand difficulties was removed; and satisfactorily so.

On the following morning very early Mr. Talbot left The Refuge, to the great grief of the boys.

Before going, he urged upon them earnestly the duty it was on their part carefully to observe the household rules, and gratefully to guard both uncle and aunt from annoyance or anxiety. And the boys promised readily to do their very best. They returned from the train, as he left, to begin their new liberated life at The Refuge.

But as they returned, it began to rain,—first gently, as if it might be nothing; then heavier, as if it might last the morning; finally a downpour, that threatened to continue all day. They had not anticipated such a misfortune, and had no umbrellas nor greatcoats to keep them dry. This mattered only so far, that it resulted in their getting wet through before they reached home. It was a sad upsetting of all their treasured plans. They could not go to the island, nor remain as they were, consistently with their aunt's wishes. Nevertheless, the temptation was cruelly strong to dodge round by the yard and stay there, instead of going into the house to 'change,' and be kept indoors, as they so much feared. They felt too sure of what their aunt's wishes would be, and therefore what their duty was, to talk to each other about the matter. Yet the temptation was almost too much for them!

Edward, Richard, and Tom walked gloomily on till they came to the gate of The Refuge. Close by it stood the gate leading to the yard. They paused between the two, hesitating. It was still raining very hard; the peaks of their caps ran wet, and they could feel the wet in their boots as they moved their toes therein. There was no doubt about it,—they were wet through. Still, to remain indoors all day long,—it was dreadful to contemplate. And the doubt inclined them to open the courtyard gate. Still they hesitated to take that road.

‘We might go home that way, just to see what Ralph is about. It is as short as the other,’ said one.

But this was too evidently a cheat on their consciences. They resolutely shut the gate again, and passed through its rival to the house. They were rewarded by seeing that their aunt had been on the watch for them, and by receiving her approving welcome.

‘Good boys, I was afraid you would go to the yard. Go and change your wet things, and then your uncle wants you. Possibly you may get to the linhays in the afternoon. It must be too wet for the island to-day.’

The boys proceeded up-stairs, almost as dirty and more wet than on their memorable walk with Matilda Letitia ; and it was a long time before they had changed their garments. They took to playing ‘bolsters’ with their wet trousers and jackets, and other animated games of that sort. At length the process was complete, and they ran down-stairs to seek their uncle. They found him with his drawing materials spread around him, with Froissart lying by him on the table, besides one or two other books.

‘Boys !’ he called to them as they entered, ‘I have been amusing myself with sketching your island. Come and see if it is right.’

‘Yes, uncle !’ and ‘No, uncle !’ answered they, examining the sketches. ‘My castle is not tall enough,’ and ‘My summer-house is not like that yet ; but it shall be, if I can make it so.’

‘Do you like that plan ?’ inquired Mr. Lawrence, pleased by their cordial interest.

‘Yes, very much indeed,’ replied Edward. ‘But let me see. I must quite pull down the old one ; for that is square, and this is an octagon. I had better pull down first, and then — ’

‘You will want poles at each corner, at least.

These will have to be cut and fixed. Then the roof must be put on.'

'How? I wonder whether I can or not.'

'Oh try,' said his uncle. 'You must have a short pole for a centre, and sloping poles from it to the sides, just overhanging for eaves; otherwise you will get all the wet in. Nor would your arbour look so pretty. You had better measure your ground exactly, and make a plan of it. Then you can make your working drawings from this sketch, if you like to follow it.'

'I am sure I will,' said Edward. 'This is an extremely pretty arbour. But the walls, uncle: had I better plaster them?'

'You can; but I think I have heard of a better plan. You have plenty of moss on the island? If not, there is a great deal about in different places. If you gather this in quantities, and dry it, it makes a very warm and durable lining for the walls. The outside you must make, by nailing laths close together on both sides of the poles, so;—you will find the moss will peep through in many places, and look extremely pretty. Outside all, you can train creepers.'

'And I can do all this myself—all but the

working drawings, uncle. How am I ever to do them?’

‘Can you draw?—not but what these require more ruling than drawing.’

‘No, uncle; I wish I could—like *that*.’

‘Come! I will show you how, if you like. Try and copy that. You will make it very ugly at first!’

Edward sat eagerly down with a pencil, and tried hard for about ten minutes, his uncle aiding him with advice now and then, and his brothers watching him.

At length he sprang up. ‘Hideous, uncle! I won’t try any more;’ and he was about to score it all over, when his uncle caught his arm.

‘Eh, you sir! you did not expect to become a Reynolds all at once, did you? That’s not so very bad. Now, look here.’ And by a few touches the picture was so improved that Edward could bear to look at it.

‘Now, why did I make these lines so?’

‘Because they were right so, I suppose,’ replied the boys.

‘Ay; but you don’t want to be like dumb beasts, do you? *Why* were they right so?’

Then, by means of an apparatus of his own

devising, and a few experiments, their uncle taught them some of the first rules in perspective.

'Now you see why?' he said.

'Yes, uncle. But twist this little house round, and you will alter all the lines,' pointing to a little model of a Swiss cottage that they had been using.

'Of course you will. How can you alter your picture, if you don't change your lines!—but the rules are the same. Now, you could copy that arbour better; or stay, copy, sketch rather, the Swiss cottage, you three. Here are pencils and paper for each, if you like.'

The boys did like. But their cottages proved most uninhabitable-looking dwellings. Again their uncle corrected them. Afterwards he made them watch him whilst he sketched the model.

'You have made yours a great deal too pretty,' said Tommy; 'but it is very like.'

'There's the luncheon bell!' exclaimed Dick. 'I had no idea it was half so late. Uncle, let us run you in? We can do it just as well as the man. Do let us try.'

'My dears!' cried their aunt in alarm.

'Let the boys try,' said kind Mr. Lawrence. 'They will not upset me.'

And the boys started the chair on its journey into the dining-room, as carefully as if it had been made of glass. They completed the transit in safety, and sat down to luncheon in high glee. Richard declared his uncle must help him about his tower ; that it was not fair for Edward to keep him altogether. And Miss Lawrence said that she believed Tommy would want her help, and that he should have any flowers he pleased, in reason, as soon as the garden was ready. After luncheon, they were bidden to put on their old clothes, and run to the yard to the linhay. Strange to relate, this command came from Miss Lawrence. But her chief motive was fear lest her brother should knock himself up with amusing them. Whatever her reason was, they obeyed joyously enough. And never did three boys pass an afternoon of more thorough enjoyment.

The linhay in which they were told to play was a large high loft over the stables, filled nearly to the roof with hay and straw—chiefly the latter. Two or three enormous beams stretched from wall to wall ; sometimes covered by the straw, but here and there the straw was partly removed, and the beam stretched free of all impediment half-way across. What joy it was to scramble along this, then to

swing from it as long as they could hold on, then to drop a fine flop into the straw below! Then up again, and round and round, shouting, and calling, and screaming to their hearts' content; for they were of an age when enjoyment without noise seemed almost an impossibility.

When tired of this sport they began another. Through the interstices between the straw-bundles they wriggled worm-fashion, following one another duck-fashion; now the passage lay flat, then it slanted upwards, when they had a puzzling climb to make; or downwards, when they had to cling tight, and protest, and shout lest they should reach the bottom in a heap. Once in the darkest part of the longest passage, when they were really longing to get into fresh air again, they encountered an angry hiss, and 'yaw!,' and a sharp scratch. They had disturbed a cat and her kittens!

Oh, how they backed and siddled out! But once out, and their courage renewed by air and light, they returned to the charge, tumbling about the bundles, and so effectually bothering puss, that she fled with her family out of the building.

In the midst of all this fun, the dinner bell rang. So gathering themselves together, pulling down

their wrinkled-up jackets, picking the straws out of their necks, and snatching their hats, they ran away home, appearing tidy in good time for dinner.

Good boys! But it must be remembered that their parents' last injunctions, Mr. Talbot's lectures, gratitude to their uncle and aunt (and immense pity for them too, owing to Mr. Talbot's story—pity which their aunt at least never suspected), besides the sense that a sort of compact of freedom for obedience existed, which might be forfeited if broken, all combined to make them careful of rules. Still they were good boys, and very manly, trustworthy boys too; such as gave promise of becoming worthy men.

The evening cleared sufficiently to allow of the constitutional walk being held in procession as usual. And here Miss Lawrence became a companion to the boys in an unexpected manner. For she caught sight of a wild-flower that she wished to examine, thinking it something new to her. One of the lads fetched it; when she found it instead an old acquaintance. But just as she was about to throw it away, she caught Tommy's eyes fixed wistfully upon her. So she called him to her side, and was surprised to find how much knowledge the

child possessed of botany,—knowledge that in this strange land of England he was longing to increase. He had an eye for every flower, wild or cultivated.

'Who taught you about flowers, little Tommy?'

'Mamma,' said Tommy, in a low voice. 'She always saw all the flowers.'

'And now they speak to him of her,' thought Miss Lawrence, 'poor little man!' So she gently took his hand, and stopped to examine the flower she still held in hers. Tommy felt very glad; and that flower done with, he asked after others that had excited his curiosity. Miss Lawrence was the best person he could apply to, because she not only knew the Latin name and order, but the far more interesting English name, and the properties of most wild-flowers, as well as any reason for which they were celebrated, and she told her knowledge clearly, if formally. She was surprised to find that Edward knew something of the insects likely to live upon the flowers, which knowledge he had picked up from his father.

'Yes,' exclaimed Dick, 'Edward and Tommy were always worrying about weeds and beetles, whenever we were out with papa and mamma! It was not my way at all.'

'No, Dick, my man! Castles and make-believe chargers are yours, are they not?' said his uncle, but so good-temperedly that, instead of taking fire, Dick came up to his chair, asking about the castle.

The lads 'retired to rest' this night at eight, for the housekeeper had given them a hint that she thought her master and mistress would be glad of the hour till nine to themselves. What possible inducement *could* persuade two grown-up, free people to go to bed before ten, the boys could not understand. But as their candle was not put out until half-past nine, they did not at all object to spending that hour and a half in their bed-room and night shirts; whilst to Mr. and Miss Lawrence the undisturbed evening was invaluable. It was their time for quiet talk and reading, and they had much missed it. This was the end of the first wet day at The Refuge. Not a bad day at all to young or old, thanks to the kind thought of each for all.



CHAPTER XIII.

TOMMY'S NEW SPADE.

THIS next day proved fine. Full of life and joy, the boys received their luncheon in the covered basket, given to them to hold it—enough bread and cheese to satisfy as many ploughmen, and a large bottle of milk. They provided themselves also with an old pocket-book for the 'working-drawings' (though Edward made an awfully long face at the idea of his ever effecting any), a foot-rule to measure with, and a tape. These things they packed up with their lunch, and away they went. Dick carried the basket, for the very good reason that he had lost his patience, and set off before the others—to make up for which impropriety, he imposed the burden of the basket upon himself. They reached the yard together, for the others ran after him.

'Can you come, Ralph ?'

'No, master, that I can't,' responded he; 'for the black cow has broken down the gate into the wheat, and she will trample it all down, so I must stay and mind it.'

'The cow ought to have known better!' exclaimed the boys. 'When can you come then, Ralph ?'

'I will work as fast as I can; but I can't tell, masters.'

'We will leave the tub for you, though; I mean Mr. Talbot's tub. We shall want the barge ourselves.'

And the boys hurried on. They unfastened their respective tubs and got into them; but it was no easy matter to get hold of the barge, nor to attach it to themselves. Not one of the three could undertake to tow it alone, and not one of the three could exactly get hold of it either! It bumped about in an unwieldy fashion; also the tubs would slip away, as their inmates tried to reach their unshapely charge. At length the rope was caught by Tommy, who shouted out the fact in great joy. He was bidden to tie it to the tail of his tub, an order which he obeyed, and began rowing away. But, alas ! the

little man's strength could not force on boat and barge too. He got very red and very hot. He toiled and toiled ; but the prospect was before them of spending the day on the water, unless the others could 'tackle on' as well. Dick at last shoved his boat close, and managed to attach two ropes, one of which he threw across to Edward, the other he kept for himself. But oh!—but oh! the oars, the oars, how they did entangle and hinder their rowers, as the three boats, dragged together by the weight behind, did nothing but bump and bother each other. The boys expended much scolding and loud talk upon each other and their misfortunes, and issued from the yard enclosures a very confused and noisy mass, to Ralph's great amusement.

'Scull, young masters, scull !' shouted he.

'Oh, I know !' exclaimed Edward, as the boys paused puzzled. 'I know ! turns backward, and sway sideways, so !' and he suited the action to the word. This was a great improvement. The single oar, thus confined to the stern of each boat, could not reach its neighbour oars, and the boats progressed with tolerable rapidity.

But as soon as the boys had landed they held an impromptu conference, to determine on the best

mode of lugging along their square barge ; and the conclusion was, that they tied the ropes together in one length, and determined to pull this, one after the other, according to age,—Edward first, then Richard, then Tommy. By this arrangement both oars could be used, and no fouling was possible. This settled, and their boats moored, they started for their work. Now the question arose, What were they going to do ? Work together or work apart ? Do one thing at once, or all things at the same time ? They decided on the latter. Dick could not keep away from his castle ; Edward was longing to demolish his arbour ; and Tommy to use the small spade that his aunt had discovered and given him. The only question was, whether Fanny's grave ought not to be cleared first. Dick said no, it had waited fifty years, and might wait one day more ; but both Edward and Tom felt, as it were, bound in honour to look after it first, and, being the majority, they gained their point. To the grave they therefore went. Edward had a hook, Tommy a pair of monstrous old scissors, a sort of linen scissors, lent him by the housekeeper ; Richard a crow-bar, and a hatchet, and a penknife, about equally efficient instruments for the work in hand !

His crow-bar he laid down, after listlessly lifting one or two insignificant stones, which might as well have lain still. His hatchet he drove at the grass with great energy and little profit. His pen-knife he took out of his pocket—and looked at.

‘Edward!’ he cried, ‘it is pure waste of time. I can do nothing with these things.’

‘Tommy’s spade is close by,’ observed his brother.

Tommy looked up. ‘Oh, Dicky! do take my scissors, they are such beauties, and I will take my own spade,’ and he sprang upon it.

‘I won’t hurt your spade,’ returned Dick. ‘Why won’t you let me have it?’

‘It is only the first time,’ said poor little Tommy, colouring up, ‘that’s all. I should like to be the first.’

‘Very well,’ returned Dick, shouldering his heavy crow-bar; ‘then I shall go, I can’t use the scissors.’

‘Then do take the spade, Richard, do!’ exclaimed Tom. ‘I didn’t mean to say no;—it was only the first time, so I did wish to use it, but I don’t care now.’

‘No!’ replied Dick, turning to go.

‘Come, Richard, take the scissors and help us. We shan’t be much longer.’

'No!' repeated Richard positively. 'I must go to the castle. I hate scissors.' And off he marched.

'Never mind, Tommy, he wants to go, you could not help it.'

But Tommy was so sorry, he was almost in tears. 'Do you think, if I ran after him, he would come back?'

'No, I don't believe he would. We can do it alone, Tommy.'

'Yes, but, Edward —. It was only the first time!'

'Of course, of course. It does not matter, Tommy. Come, we will finish here.'

The two boys worked busily, and soon Fanny would not have known her grave, if she could have trotted up and looked at it. But all the zest in his work was gone with Tommy—scattered by this unfortunate disagreement. And as soon as the grave was done, and Edward had departed to his arbour, Tommy sat down very mournfully by his garden plot. He wished 'mamma' were there with all his little aching heart. He could not withstand his feelings at last, but jumped up to seek his brother Dick. He scrambled up the rocky path, but on the castle site Dick was not. Guided by the sounds of

click, click, click, which Tommy heard incessantly repeated close by, the child advanced to the brink of the quarry, and looked down. There was Dick, heaving in his crow-bar into the cracks between the stones, hammering it in with his hatchet to the utmost depth that his force could drive it, and then dragging it down by the head to dislodge the stones. He was sadly in want of a pick-axe, but, nevertheless, he had surrounded himself with a fair heap of stones. He looked so busy and occupied, that Tommy dared not interrupt him ; and soon, on the boy's stopping to cool himself, he sang out such a merry song, that Tommy crept back to his work more contented, feeling sure that Dick would not sing like that if he were very vexed. All three boys were thus scattered over the island, busy about their own devices.

Dick had 'tumbled together' a heap of stones, as we have seen.

Edward had attacked his arbour with such force and vehemence that he soon succeeded in surrounding himself with a heap of ruins.

Tommy had done very little by the time his brothers had achieved all this success, because of his conscience and his brotherly love, poor wee

man! But he then set to work, and soon had dug up a flat plot into a pit and a hillock, with a fair strew of weeds and earth outside.

By this time the hour for luncheon had arrived, so Teddy and Tom sat down on the oak-bank to eat; but Dick did not come.

'Perhaps he is still angry!' thought Tom, 'and yet it was a pretty tune.'—'Do you think Dick knows what o'clock it is, Edward?' he asked at length.

'If he is as hungry as I am, I should think he did.'

'Shall I run and see?' inquired Tommy, a little while after.

'No; I think not; he ought to know,' replied Edward, who had entirely forgotten the spade affair, and did not see any trouble in Tommy's manner.

'We must not eat it all,' observed Tommy again.

'We will eat our share, and leave the rest here for him.'

'I can carry it to him,' replied little Tom.

'No, no; why should you bother about it? Let Richard learn to know the time better.'

Nevertheless, when Edward had returned to clear away the rubbish of his old arbour, little Tom

carried off the basket, and again climbed the path to his brother's castle. Richard was not to be seen, nor was his click to be heard. Tom sought him, and was just going to call, when he caught sight of him sitting disconsolately by his heap of stones, with a broken hatchet in his hand, and his crow-bar was lying at his feet. The boy looked very tired. Tommy hurried down over the sides of the quarry, and reached his brother. He placed the basket before him without a word, and was delighted to see how Richard's eye brightened at the sight, and especially when he was told that it was all his—he might eat it all.

He did so, and the soul of the hero revived. He returned to his work, determined to despise broken hatchets or any other trouble. He was much charmed to hear Tommy remark on his fine heap of stones, and he worked on with a heart, supplying the hatchet's place by a big stone, which certainly did as well, and observing that he could put a new handle into his hatchet before to-morrow. Tommy had brought his spade, with which he now busied himself, to remove the rubbish from Richard's stones. He wanted to pile them up nicely for him, and in a great measure he succeeded. Richard was delighted

and happy, without in the least knowing how much this was caused by his little brother's kindness. He too had completely forgotten about the spade ; indeed, he had never been really vexed. He had fancied himself so, and had been heartily glad of the excuse to get away from Fanny's grave. He was not conscious of having been cross ; he was only exceedingly eager ; and he had now no suspicion of all that was working in his little brother's mind. Tommy did not venture to say anything about it. He worked on for some time ; then gathering up his basket and spade, he tripped joyfully up the quarry path, back to his garden, to dig another corner into a pit and a hillock, but to be quite happy, except for the chilling want of mamma, which he so often felt. She would have known of his little bit of selfishness, and his great efforts to make up ; no one else could. She would have rewarded him with a kiss, and very likely papa would too, if he had been by to see it all. Oh, how glad Tommy would have been ! Five years more—dear—dear ! Very likely poor mamma's and papa's hearts were aching too.

Tommy's thoughts were fortunately diverted by a gallantly gay butterfly that just then fluttered past.,

He dropped his spade, of course, and set off in chase ; but equally, of course, he returned empty-handed. So he resumed his spade, and began to clear his gutter. Then he thought he would go and seek for Teddy. He did not above half like all this separate working. So he forced his way through the bushes, stood before his brother, and exclaimed loudly at the mighty clearance Edward had made. The arbour was gone ; and nought but a heap of ruins remained, which Edward was busily removing.

‘Here ; I'll help !’ cried Tommy.

And he set to work again, and bore his part with so much good-will, that, by the time it was necessary to think of returning, the heap was removed, and the actual site of the arbour stood clear, at least of ruins. Edward was much pleased. He then set himself to measure it exactly, which, with Tommy's assistance, he succeeded in effecting with a sufficient approach to exactness.

Afterwards the two sought Dick, and duly admired his stones. Then they gathered up their tools, wonderful to relate, considering they were of the *genus* ‘boy,’ and proceeded to their boats. They tried the long-towing plan on returning, and found it answer well. The wharf they reached

safely enough, and securing their gallant barks, repaired to the house, chattering busily. Plans after plans were discussed and dismissed, cropping up again as their brother plans were also given up. In fact, the boys planned in a circle with exceeding animation for a long time, until they finally determined to 'ask uncle.' What a change Mr. Talbot had effected, that such a resource should be thought of!



CHAPTER XIV.

CASTLE BUILDING.

O, after dinner, to their uncle they applied. Edward brought his measurements; Richard his lively imagination; Tommy had no particular plans to detail. He hoped some day to see his hillocks fill up his pits, his gutter flowing, and his flowers in bloom; but he had no present plan for effecting all this. Edward had his measurements ready; he wanted to make an arbour like his uncle's picture—his difficulty lay in how to do. His idea was quite feasible, though it might be beyond his powers, or tax them to the utmost. But Richard, redoubtable Richard, who no sooner saw a difficulty than he ran full tilt at it, and dashed by, without ever seeing whether he had knocked it down or not!—he was full of results. He saw in his mind's eye a firm, lordly castle, minia-

ture perhaps, standing on that 'steep.' He saw its gate open, and himself ride out armed cap-a-pie, etc. etc. But how to begin this, further than by the scattering of stones, that he had already accomplished, he saw not. Indeed he did not much trouble himself with the construction. He adopted the motto in full: 'Well begun, is half done.' And from the fall of his first stone, earlier even, from his first vividly clear imagination, he had considered this good beginning was half accomplishment. Therefore to his uncle's pertinent question: 'How do you mean to build, Richard?' he characteristically replied: 'I have dug ever so many stones, uncle!'

'But how do you mean to put them together?' persisted his uncle.

'Oh, uncle! I want you to tell me;—but when they are together, uncle, I must get my armour, and—'

'My boy—my boy!' exclaimed his uncle, 'I do not wish to check you, but do bring your common sense to work. *How* are you going to get the stones together?'

'Why, uncle! I must build them, I suppose.'

'But can you build?'

'No, but I can learn. It is not very difficult I should think. It is but laying the mortar and placing the stones!'

'I doubt if that is all,' said his uncle, smiling. 'But to make your stones rest on the rock, if it slopes as you describe, you must either dovetail them into it, or dig deep foundations. I should say you had better measure your site, as Edward has his, carefully.'

'I can do that to-morrow. But now, uncle, when my castle is built, and I have my armour, and—'

'Would you like to look at some plans of old castles? You can make out what they held, and on what arrangement they were built. It might guide you with regard to your own. Take that book with the black binding out of the shelf—there! you will find a castle in it!'

Dicky took his book, and seating himself with a fist on each temple he buried his thoughts in his castle.

Edward had been trying to arrange his drawings by himself. Very few ever attempted to get into Richard's way when he was running a tilt on his hobbies! and Ted was therefore busy alone. But now that his uncle was at liberty, he transported

himself and his performances close to his side, and began consulting busily. How long the uprights were to be,—what pitch the roof was to have,—how stout the side rafters must be,—how wide the door and windows,—how the floor was to be made,—how much moss would be wanted ; and lathes, etc. etc. There was plenty to ask about ! Mr. Lawrence made him take the proportions of the little sketch, and so to arrange the height, and breadth, and depth of his new arbour.

Whilst they were busy about this, they were attracted by a noise in the room, and looking up they observed Richard, pacing frantically backwards and forwards in one corner. On all four bursting out laughing, Richard flung back a long black curl from his forehead and exclaimed : ‘ I have been pacing my castle. Uncle, look here ! it must be square, with very thick walls. Next the walls inside must be little apartments, for the soldiers and servants. Then a large square—all round—’

‘ You Irishman ! ’ said his uncle.

‘ You know what I mean ! of course, all round a centre keep, donjon, castle, fort ; what am I to call it, uncle ? ’

'Donjon or keep, it had both names. It was the last part to be taken, when the castle was attacked.'

'Big enough for everybody to live in,' cried the eager boy. 'Why, uncle, I reckon that it could not be so small as this room! Then as wide again for the square, and as wide again for—'

'Why, it will take up all the island,' cried all the other boys—

'Yes, and the river would be the moat,—that would be perfection! then—'

'Perfection—indeed!' exclaimed his brothers; 'where would my arbour be!' or 'my garden,' or 'Fanny's grave?'

'Oh, no!—of course it could not be,' replied Richard, doubtfully, and rather mournfully.

'Of course not; but you might imagine that you inherited a castle, that had undergone a long siege, and had only its donjon left—you might find room for a donjon and a wall, perhaps, on your pinnacle of rock?'

'Only just,' said Richard, sadly still.

'Measure and try how big it must be.'

'Eight feet one way, and ten feet another, I reckon, at the least. The donkey and I could not live there with less.'

The mournful tone and manner with which this was uttered tickled the whole party again into hearty laughter. But Mr. Lawrence soon recovered himself enough to say :

‘Measure the rock to-morrow, Richard, and we will see what can be done. I am afraid the castle must be somewhat modified ; but we will do our best. Tommy, what have you been doing ?’

‘Tommy must have his garden dug for him,’ replied Miss Lawrence. ‘It stands apparently in need of more knowledge than he possesses.’

‘Perhaps he can acquire the knowledge, which is better than being helped ? But where was Ralph to-day ?’

‘Busy about the old cow’s gate, plaguey old thing !’

‘What was the matter ?’ inquired Mr. Lawrence.

‘Oh ! the cow had broken into the corn, and so Ralph had to mend the gate.’

‘That was a pity,’ opined Mr. Lawrence. ‘But Ralph will be free to-morrow, I daresay. Still I think you have done very well without him to-day.’

To-morrow, however, Ralph was not free. The cow had committed more peccadilloes than were at first discovered. Railing as well as gate had

suffered, and Ralph would be employed at least all the morning in mending them. So the boys must go alone again, hoping that Ralph might follow after his dinner; but not caring very much about it. The work of each lad was cut out for him. Richard had to measure his ground. Edward had to clear his site completely of earth and other accumulations, and to make the holes for his poles, which he had also to find, and shape to his purpose. Tommy was to see how much digging he could get through in an hour, by his aunt's desire, who had no confidence whatever in his powers. He had a fancy of his own, too, for clearing his gutter. But it was very probable that his own love of society, and the wants of his brothers, would allow him comparatively little time for his own work!

The boys landed, and hurried at once to their respective spots. Richard strode rapidly up the hill, with his tape and ruler. He had also provided himself with a pick-axe. Arrived on his peak, he first paced it carefully. It was not very promising! The rock was steep, and very hard. Indeed, from the quarry which adjoined it good building stones, as square and flat as bricks, had been dug. Much of this hardness was concealed

under a coating of soft moss; but it was soon enough betrayed by any attempt to dig. In measurement, the platform took five strides one way and six across; but even this space was not level; whilst immediately beyond, the hill sloped so rapidly, that no wall could rest on it without deep foundations, very difficult to cut out. Six strides by five strides represented about 10 feet by 12 feet. Scarcely room for Dick and the donkey, walls inclusive! It would be puzzling, too, to persuade the walls to stand.

Richard stood and pondered, refreshing himself now and then with a violent dig at the rock, which did jar him through and through. He was not exactly discouraged, but he was puzzled—sorely puzzled. Yet his determination did not waver. If a boy could plant a castle on that height, he WOULD. After much thought, and walking backwards and forwards, he drew out the line of his walls. He left the summit in some places, coming a little down the hill, where he found the rock would at all give way to rubble. He recalled the forts at his father's station abroad, and endeavoured to follow their form in a measure, since the square keep of the knightly castle with its corner towers

could not be managed exactly. Having drawn out his lines as correctly as he could, he measured them. They were alarmingly long! The breadth of the wall, he thought, might be about a foot, as no guns were ever likely to knock it down, and the height about 6 feet, at first at any rate.

Having arranged his plans so far, he began to consider the steps by which he must accomplish them. The foundations must be dug,—the stones must be quarried,—they must be carried from the quarry to the castle,—lime must be got, conveyed to the island, and made into mortar,—Richard must learn to build,—*then* the walls must be built! There lay plenty of work before him. Still his spirit did not quail. Still his determination was unshaken. If a boy could plant a castle up there, he would be that boy. It was a brave resolution to make after all that facing of difficulties. And it quite tired Dick. It made him think that luncheon-time must be near. So away he went down the hill to seek his brothers. He found them both busy about the arbour. Tommy had grubbed in his gutter for some time in the beginning of the morning; and Tommy had built a little grotto with the shells scattered about, planting it round about with weeds

in flower, and trimming it with picked flowers. He had made a very pretty little erection indeed, and he had stuck one or two short sticks, fancifully dressed with leaves, for people entering the arbour. It did not help his garden very much, but this was of little consequence.

At length he wearied of his grotto and his own company, and betook himself to search for Edward.

'Edward,' said he, 'I do think it would be so nice if we were to cut down all these bushes between you and me and make it all one?'

'So do I, Tommy. If you don't mind, you can take that saw and cut away. It will be very nice, and we can stick up a boundary where you begin and I end.'

'Yes; and I'll begin here to cut close by you.'

Tommy thought this a famous arrangement, combining society and work in the pleasantest manner. He had, moreover, a saw to use, and shortly afterwards his brother lent him a hatchet. Joy of joys! he cut and hacked away to his heart's content, whilst Edward was busy about his work. He had brought a shovel with him, for the boys had leave to borrow if they took care to return. A most unmanageable tool for a beginner, given to twist over

directly it was safely loaded,—and an immensity of trouble it gave him ; but he did get the earth away somehow, and his site was becoming quite clear and level. He would soon be ready for the crow-bar to dig the holes. He took out his knife, and, cutting some short sticks, he pointed and peeled them, and marked out his arbour with them.

Tommy, by this time, required rest from his work of demolition. He paused and looked round.

‘That rock behind the arbour, Edward, ought to have a honeysuckle over it,’ he remarked, ‘and ivy over the arbour, Edward.’

‘No, I think not ; the moss will be enough. I will not have any flowers either, Tommy, except perhaps the honeysuckle, which is half wild. Because, you see, this ought to be wild and wooded, whilst your garden must be bright and pretty. I wonder what Dick is about ?’

‘I don’t know. We shall look very pretty, Edward. I ought to see you, and you ought to see me.’

‘So we shall, as soon as you clear it away.’

‘I’ll work very hard. But is it not luncheon-time, Edward ? I am getting so hungry, and I have been working *so* hard !’

'We will fetch Dick, then.'

But Dick did not require any fetching. His instinct had told him that eating time was near, and he appeared just as the two were thinking of him. He was all amazement at the clearance made about the arbour-site, which he was much inclined to admire greatly. He thought that his uncle's sketch, if carried into effect there, would be exceedingly appropriate and pretty; then, whilst the two boys and he were eating, he favoured them with his views upon his own prospects on the Peak, as he called it. He held to common sense for some time; but ere-long his naturally bombastic spirit burst forth, and he was building castles of fairy impossibilities in the air, as unlike the castle of his morning thoughts as could be.

In this mode he conducted his brothers to the scene of his labours. He displayed to them the advantages and disadvantages of his position as one of defence and offence,—in fact, he was an engineer, a knight, a baron, and what not, all at once. Whilst in this vein, a rabbit or a weasel, or, it might be a rat, crossed his path. Instantly it was a 'dangerous wild beast,' to be chased, to be killed, annihilated without mercy and without delay. He dashed down

the path after it into the quarry—by no means an easy path either. Not finding the poor little scared beastie there, he pushed on, cheering and urging as if their remaining on the island depended on their success, but not vouchsafing a word of explanation to all this fuss. His brothers, of course, dashed after him, excited they knew not why, chasing they knew not what, until, after a hunt of a good six minutes' duration, they pulled up together on the green, when he condescended to inform them that he thought he saw a rat—or it might have been a mouse! and, when he found them inclined to growl, he scolded them for their want of imagination.

'It might have been a lion, you know,' he said, 'only this is not the place for lions,' and they were forced to agree that this was the only evident reason why it should not have been a lion.

'Now,' said Teddy, 'I want your crow-bar. I have some holes to make. I will soon make them, and you shall have it again. I don't think I shall be all the afternoon.'

'You are very welcome, only it is in the yard,' replied Dick soberly.

'Why did not you bring it?' exclaimed Edward.

'Because I did not want it,' returned his brother.

'The pickaxe is a great deal better, but it won't dig your holes.'

'No! what am I to do?'

'Suppose, Teddy,' said little Tom, 'we clear away the paths and my garden this afternoon. You know if my garden was put to rights, and my seeds were sown, I could help everybody whilst they were growing!'

'A very good idea,' Edward thought. 'Besides, Tommy, you have helped everybody, and you deserve to be helped. But here comes Ralph!'

'Ralph, Ralph! are you coming to help?'

'Yes, Master Tommy; I am come to dig your garden. Miss Lawrence sent me to dig it all over. So come, little master, I must be quick, and finish it to-day.'

'We are going to help as well,' said the two boys.
'Richard, come too.'

'I! No, indeed. My work is precious hard, I can tell you. I must go to it. Good-bye.'

Then the two boys and Ralph went earnestly to work, and soon made an immense show. The garden had its back turned cornerwise to the arbour, and faced towards the south. It was lower on the hill, and it lay on a very gradual slope. One walk

- led up the middle, with branch walks on either side, and a grassy, mossy bank bordering all, where the stones or rocks did not interfere. The garden was not much overhung or shaded by trees anywhere, and the lower side of it being quite free, the view beyond was a pretty one, looking across the water to the rich though flat country in the distance.

Two or three hours of busy work quite changed the appearance of this little spot. One garden-bed after another was cleared and well-dug by Ralph, whilst Edward cut away the brambles and bushes near, and Tommy bore them away in his arms. A barrow was much wanted evidently, but the making this must wait for a rainy day. At length, the hour approached for returning. Sorry enough the boys were to go, but it was a matter of necessity. They had never been allowed to mistake rebellion for manliness ; they had too wise a mother and too really manly a father for *that*. So their tools were collected, and off they went, Ralph and all.

That evening, when reporting progress to their uncle, he listened with great surprise to Richard's sensible statement of facts respecting his work, and

delighted the boy by confidently prophesying his success, if his patience would but hold out. Edward, too, had made good progress; and in Tommy's garden, progress had been made for him, much to his aunt's satisfaction.



CHAPTER XV.

DIFFICULTIES—‘PECKED AT.’

BUT it is unnecessary to follow these young men through all their days of ‘toil and endeavour.’ We will jump to the end of a week, and notice the progress completed by that time. It had been a fine week. No day had proved rainy; so that the boys had been unchecked by any weather impediments, and certainly had made the utmost of their freedom on the island, as far as enjoyment went.

Tommy’s garden had profited by the labour bestowed upon it. Ralph had not come again. But the two boys had agreed to divide their time between the arbour and the garden, and had, in consequence, rapidly progressed with both. It was an effort to Edward to make this arrangement, but he soon felt its advantage, in the pleasure of Tom’s

companionship, and the increased spirit given by change of work. The week saw the garden dug all over, such plants as remained properly placed, and encroaching brambles quite cleared away. Much remained to be done, but there was now no hurry, since the seeds could be sown, and the plants would grow, and the weeds had been checked. The gutter and its basin were the next job the two boys intended to undertake, though, where the water was now, they did not know. An expedition in search of the spring was to be undertaken immediately. Between the arbour and the garden an open space had been cleared, greatly to the improvement of both. The view among the trees, in which the arbour was to be, was as great an improvement to the garden, as that of the latter, in which the flowers were to be, was to the arbour.

This edifice itself had not progressed far. The time had not been long enough to admit of this, but the holes for the upright posts were dug. A long morning had been spent in fetching the poles that Ralph had given Edward out of some stores in the yard, in floating them as a raft to the island, and in carrying them to the arbour. Here they were lying by the end of the week, ready to be

posted in the ground. Another morning had been spent in conveying laths, which Mr. Lawrence had given Edward, to the island, and arranging them by the posts. So, though the work done did not appear so great as that in the garden, it was well advanced, and the next steps would make much show.

Now the moss had to be gathered and dried in readiness. There was still a good fortnight of real labour before the arbour could be finished, but the advance towards completion had been steady, and the boys' spirits were as unflagging as ever.

We must trace Richard's proceedings. We left him after making a very sensible arrangement for his future progress. He had chosen the various steps which were to lead his castle towards completion, and he commenced work on the day after, full of most sanguine expectations of rapid success. He utterly refused all assistance, either to give or to receive it. He declared all the fun would be lost if anybody helped him; and as for helping other people, with the tremendous amount of labour lying before him, this was indeed impossible. He started alone for his hill, unsettled, however, as to which

step he meant to begin with. It was evident that no stones could be laid without the foundation being dug, and equally evident that no foundation was of any use without stones. But he thought he would dig the foundations first, and the stones afterwards. So shouldering his pick and crow-bar—for he had both this time—he strode on and up, exulting in his happy prospects of soon possessing a beautiful castle.

It was a lovely morning. The air was fresh, the grass sparkling with dew, the distant landscape half shaded, half revealed by a rising mist; but Dick had no eyes, of course, for all this—he could not waste so much time—not he! Down went his crow-bar with a rattling crash. Up rose his pick, brandished in the air; down it came on a projecting shoulder of rock, and split a large piece off. A most happy commencement. Up came the pick again, then down, with the same result; again and again, each time shivering some of the rock to pieces, and by the end of five minutes making considerable show.

Richard then paused to contemplate. ‘If I do so much as this every five minutes,’ he thought, ‘I shall soon have finished. Let me see! I have

been about five minutes, or ten, I suppose, altogether. If I do as much in another ten—I'll just pace it, and see how long I shall be doing all.'

And he threw down his pick, and strode away, stepping his distances. Six strides by eight was the square, which would give twenty-eight strides round; but his lines lay, as we have said, zigzag, necessarily because of the formation of the ground. They were, therefore, about twice as long, or nearly sixty strides, which represented about 120 feet. What a job to cut and build all that length! But Richard looked at the ragged bit of rock that he had broken up, and reflected that though it was not deep or level yet, it was considerably larger than a foot square; so he might reckon it a foot done. So he might reckon on thus: ten minutes to dig out one foot, or six feet done in one hour; three hours to work in the morning, two in the afternoon, that is five hours in each day, or thirty feet done! Thirties in one hundred and twenty go four; four days and the foundations would be done. Dick felt that he might rest, he was getting on so fast! So he sat still, and began to speculate on the rest of the labour. The stones would not take so long,

near,—the building would be playwork, *quite*; and as for bringing up the stones, why, of course, he would reckon that in the time taken by the building! He was so exultant in this immediate prospect of rapid success, that he gave his imagination full leave to play, and it was always sufficiently ready: now he was cantering and caracolling down the hill—he must teach the donkey to caracole! or buy a pony—ay! that was it! How stupid he had been, never to think of that before! He had 10s., and he was to have 10s. more when he went to school, that was £1 towards it. He dared say— But here Richard stopped; money was a stubborn thing, it would not grow at his bidding, as his castle did. So he was very reluctantly obliged to believe that the donkey must be his steed after all. Still— But what distant clock was that striking? It never could be twelve! it counted very like it. He never should get done like this; and he jumped up, and seized his pick again. He rammed away at the rock three or four times, but his thoughts were out on an expedition, and his arms grew very tired.

Soon he really thought it a pity to expend all his strength at once on the hardest bit. Of course

he had been very right to begin upon that ; but he had better go on with some easier part. And he marched off to find a ‘rubbly’ bit. Here he worked manfully for several minutes. The stones did come away with such delightful ease, and roll and slip down the hill so much like boys let loose for a holiday, that he enjoyed the commotion he was making among them, and continued tumbling them down, without much regard to the line he kept, nor the steadiness of his foundations. He made a fine strew, and a sort of broken pit, but not much of a foundation. Still the ease of this work made him resume his calculations, as soon as he became a little tired ; and he reflected that one foot in ten minutes was too low an estimate, and therefore, *par consequent*, four days was too long a time in which to complete his foundations. Full of this grand idea, and very hungry, he departed in quest of his brothers. They were fully as conscious as he was that luncheon-time had arrived ; and the three gathered under their oak.

‘I shall have done my foundations in less than four days, Edward,’ began Richard. ‘A hundred and twenty feet in three days, not so bad !’

‘Is it all rubble, then ?’ inquired Ted.

‘Rubble! I wish you could see it—it is as hard as it can be, I should think!’

‘Then, how can you get on so fast? You must have made a mistake, Dick.’

‘No, indeed. I have carefully reckoned it all up. Five minutes, no, ten, I took to dig the hardest part, and much less to dig the rubble.’

‘Five minutes to dig *out*—level—and dig *deep enough* for a foundation—so hard a piece of rock!’

‘No; I did not finish one foot, but I scratched up two in five minutes, and more than two.’

Tommy burst out laughing. But on his brother turning angrily upon him, and demanding why he laughed, he smothered it in his mug of milk, and listened on with gravity.

‘Then, you have been working two hours, and have cleared twelve feet?’ inquired Edward.

How provoking to have his eyes so unpleasantly opened! Dick bustled up, declaring he must go back to his work; but a fellow got so tired, he could not ram at those rocks for ever. Edward fully agreed, adding that Dick had much better adopt their plan, work together, and so get change of employment.

But Dick utterly repudiated any idea of not

finishing by himself, and returned to his labour. But his heart was gone about excavating his rock. It was too bad of those fellows to laugh at and discourage him so unkindly ; really, it was not his fault if he were so worried ; he should go in his quarry, and work there. And there he went accordingly, and dug steadily for some time. But as the rock at length got very hard, he stopped, and began to carry up loads of stones to the peak. Four or five times he passed up and down, each time more wearily and listlessly than before, until at last, having laden himself with an uncomfortable heap of rolling stones, and dropped a portion of them half-way up, he was so disgusted with the load that he opened his arms, and let the whole *posse* chase one another down the hill to the quarry again.

This was the last stroke of work he did. And his imagination being dulled by his want of success, he could not amuse himself with castle-building in fancy. Therefore he dawdled about until it was time to return to the house.

This first day's proceedings were a fair picture of the rest of the week's. Instead of four days finishing the foundations, and less than four the quarry-

ing, he had nothing to show but a number of little holes, all abandoned and incomplete; a fair amount of pits among the rubble; and a good heap of dug stones, of which about a small cart-load had been carried to the peak! Not *so* much advance as he had promised himself.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE PROVES CATCHING.

THIS new week was begun by Ted and Tom planning to gather some moss. A fair quantity could be got on the island, but it was very ornamental there, and the boys inclined to pick it in a neighbouring wood instead. They were describing their plan to Mr. Lawrence, when he recommended that Ralph and the donkey-cart should go with them, and that Tommy should ride the donkey, postillion fashion. Tommy adopted the idea with a shout of delight, in which his brother joined. Richard did not. He had refused to help or be helped so long, that he could scarcely offer to join now in this pleasant expedition. Besides, was it not confessing himself beaten, to leave his castle not only unfinished, but scarcely well begun? However, his silence and his disconsolate looks were soon

observed, when both brothers united with Mr. Lawrence in insisting on his going. He demurred and demurred, till Tommy conquered him by saying that he should ride instead of himself, and that he ought to take advantage of the opportunity to practise riding the donkey before he really wanted him. Richard's spirits rose directly! This expedition would thus help his project as well as theirs. He did not thank Tommy. His eager mind grasped its new idea too fully; there remained no room for remembering how much the gentle little boy had given up for him.

Mr. and Miss Lawrence, however, did observe both the little brother's kindness and the elder's unconscious selfishness. They remarked it to each other after the boys had left the room.

'Dick is too eager,' said Mr. Lawrence; 'or rather not too eager, but too unthinking. He gives pain very needlessly, and never sees it. And about his tower I can hear nothing. I don't like to ask; but I very much suspect his grand ideas have evaporated in talk. He had formed an excellent plan too! Edward is the steadiest, not the cleverest; but he will do many times over as much as his brother. As for that dear little man Tommy!'

'Oh, brother! he is the sweetest child! How his mother can bear to leave him, I cannot think!'

'It is very, very hard. But I should more fear to leave Richard. He needs sympathy and guidance more than any one I ever knew. I wish I could get at him about his castle. Sister, could I get across to the island?'

'BROTHER!' exclaimed Miss Lawrence. It was all she could say.

'In a barge I might. I long like a child to go there.'

'My dear brother!' repeated Miss Lawrence in a tone of deepest sympathy and pain.

'Suppose we consulted Edward? He has plenty of good sense, and I am sure he would not let me be hurt. You could speak to him? I do so long to go! I feel quite foolish about it.'

'We can ask Edward, brother! I am sure no one would stop you, if—;' but the poor lady left the room as she said this. She was quite overwhelmed by her dread of the risk he might run.

In the meantime, the boys started on their expedition, and rare fun they had. The donkey proved a very decent sort of animal, without much



RETURN FROM THE EXPEDITION.—PAGE 177.

curvetting or caracolling in him, and yet not so docile that Richard found it all ‘plain sailing’ to manage him. When the gathering of the moss commenced, he was taken out of the cart, and Richard enjoyed a good ride upon him, much to his own satisfaction ; whether to the donkey’s, we cannot say. It is probable that this respected beast had looked upon the release from the cart as a signal for dinner, and that therefore he did not appreciate with perfect complacency the running up and down and about which the boy imposed upon him. But be this as it may, donkey did dine sometime, and Richard did ride, and the boys and Ralph did fill the cart with beautiful moss, stuffed in as tightly as ever it could be pressed. This done the donkey was re-harnessed, and the party proceeded homewards, Tommy riding now, at Ralph’s suggestion, and the others on foot, or in the cart, as they pleased. The moss was strewn on the floor of an outhouse to dry, as soon as they arrived in the yard. It would not be wanted for nearly a fortnight.

That day, after dinner, Mr. Lawrence proposed his idea to the boys. Their delight was extreme ; and Tommy charmed his aunt by expressing his eager hope that she would come also. But she was

very much agitated, poor thing. She could not bear to check her brother, though she was well-nigh terrified to think of his attempting such an expedition ; and no great wonder, considering his utter helplessness. Even Edward began, on second thoughts, to get frightened, but he promised to consider the matter, and consult with Ralph. Dick pooh-poohed all idea of risk. He was sure that a big barge—a real barge—safely decked, could be towed to the yard-wharf ; that nothing could be easier than to run the chair on it, tow or row it across, and run the chair off when it reached the island. Tommy's thoughts flew to the island. ‘We must make the paths wider and smoother. Uncle, you must wait a day or two, and let us get it ready for you.’

‘Very well. I will give you one day to consult with Ralph, and two days more to widen the paths. Then, if I can, I will come, and sister shall come too !’

‘Oh, brother, do be careful, and not run foolish hazards ! We have been very happy without the island for many years now !’

‘Yes ; but I want to see the boys' work. I want to go, like a baby,’ cried Mr. Lawrence, laughing.

'And you shall come,' said Dick.

But Edward turned gravely to his aunt. 'Aunt,' he said, 'I will talk to Ralph, and we will think carefully. We shall be very, very glad to have uncle on the island, but he shall not come if there is risk; indeed, he shall not.'

'Very well, Edward, I will try and trust you.'

'Yes,' cried her brother, 'we will trust Edward. Dick! you dear young scatter-brain! thank you heartily for your ready welcome. We will trust you also when you learn to think.'



CHAPTER XVII.

STABILITY VERSUS ABILITY.

'**L**EARN to think, indeed! and to be called a scatter-brain! I should like to know why?' said Richard to himself, as he followed his brothers, on the following morning, to seek for and consult Ralph. 'I am sure I could get uncle over without any harm, just as well as anybody else!'

However, Ralph, when consulted, found more difficulty in the project. He thought it would be easy enough to get his master on board from the yard, and afterwards to tow him across; but the landing on the island struck him as almost impossible,—anything like a slip or a fall being so very dangerous. Edward inquired if animals were ever embarked in the barges, and if so, how? Ralph replied that a platform was run out from the yard

to the barge, and the animals were pushed along upon it. Then Edward inquired, if the platform had rails, could not his uncle's chair be pushed along it to the boat, and pushed off it to the island? Pushed along it to the boat would require care, but was easy enough; but at the island there was no even landing-place on which to rest the platform, that the chair might be wheeled off. Would not the shore do? Edward asked again. But Ralph thought not, unless they could fasten the boat more steadily than he believed was possible. However, he would borrow a barge and try, when the boys were present to try also.

'We have three days to manage it in,' cried Edward. 'Tommy, we must go and clear the paths. I wish we could finish the arbour, but the paths must come first. Richard, will you help?'

'No!' persisted Dick. 'If uncle is coming, I must get on with my castle, or he will see that I have been doing nothing.'

'But your path must be cleared as well as the others. You may as well help about that.'

'No, Edward, I can't. You ought to remember what a job I have in hand. I must stick to it, or it will never be done. It is all very well for you and

Tom, who have so much less work to do; I can't possibly help.'

'But how is uncle to get up to you? You can't expect us to make your path, if we do all the others, and you won't help.'

'You'll do better for a change, and a little company, Master Richard; if you'll take my advice,' observed Ralph.

'No, I shall not—let me alone!' said Dick impatiently. 'I can't help; I will do my own path in time, and it will be a much wider, grander path than yours; but if I have not time now, uncle must stay at the bottom. I can't help it, I can't do everything at once.'

Richard jumped into his boat with much annoyance in his manner, as he said this; and his brothers ceased to bother him, seeing that it was useless. They all pushed off for their island. Arrived there, Richard started as usual alone for his peak; but the other two waited to inspect the landing. They were in the habit of bringing their boats to shore by a rock, but it was too uneven to allow of the platform being firmly planted on it; otherwise the spot was favourable enough. Large trees stood conveniently near, to which the boat could be

steadily moored, and by a fair amount of exertion a road could be made on to meet the regular path up the hill. The boys stood long over this rock, considering what they could possibly do to make it convenient.

'I tell you what, Tommy!' exclaimed Edward at length, 'we will go back for two pickaxes, and see if we cannot level the rock. It is plenty broad enough at the bottom, which is well out of the water. I think we might level it; will you come?'

'Yes, I'll come;—but the rock looks very hard, Ted! Never mind, we will try.'

So into their boats the boys got, and back they rowed to the yard, for two pickaxes and a shovel. These obtained, they returned and set to work. The rock was very hard; but after an hour of steady endeavour they so far succeeded as to give them fair hope of obtaining a good platform, in the remaining two days. They could not work any longer then, they were really too tired; so after luncheon, which they ate by themselves, for Dick had carried his away, they began to clear the road to the path. This was much easier to do, but still it would be a long job; and Edward and Tom were at last obliged to rest themselves, by a run up to

their garden and arbour, and a ramble generally about the island.

In the course of this ramble they came upon Dick. He had been working more steadily during this day, but he was thoroughly disheartened ; and certainly his brothers were astonished at the very small progress his wonderful castle had made. They urged him again to join forces with them, but to no purpose : he insisted on being left to himself, and his own unaided strength ; so they complied, but they felt very sorry for him.

The report they gave their uncle that evening pleased him, and somewhat reassured Miss Lawrence, because she saw that they were really taking pains to make the expedition safe for her brother ; still she could not help wishing that he had never admitted such a wild idea as getting her and himself across to that island. And half amused, half annoyed, and considerably alarmed, she listened to their schemes, wondering at her brother's eagerness, but pleased by the boys' animated desire to convey him to the scene of their labours, if possible.

On the next day, they strove again to make things a 'little conformable' as Ralph called it. He was to come to the island in the afternoon, and give

his advice and help. When he arrived he highly approved, and was so cheery and hopeful, that he roused the boys to toil on with double spirit. He brought also his own strong arm and efficient help. He could do more in one hour towards levelling the landing-place and road than the boys could in a whole morning. Under his vigorous strokes, the rock and the road could be seen to grow smoother. One day's work more,—and he declared that Mr. Lawrence could be landed, 'as easy as a glove.' He said 'he would go in the morning very early, and get over the hard work, leaving it to the boys to finish off. Then he would fetch the barge, rail and fit the platform before his dinner, and if the young gentlemen could come and help him in the afternoon, they would try the experiment before Mr. Lawrence came.' The boys promised all possible aid; they were in the greatest delight, and it would be difficult to say which took most exercise, their tongues or their hands, during that afternoon.

We pass over Ralph's morning work, and the boys' of the forenoon, to come to the afternoon, when the result of all their endeavours was to be proved. They had *forced* Richard to abandon his solitary labours and come to their assistance. All

three therefore pulled merrily back to the yard that afternoon, to aid in the transportation of the barge.

They found the unwieldy vessel lying alongside the wharf. It was, of course, moored 'fore-and-aft' to the usual posts, and by its side lay a platform, sufficiently wide to ensure a safe passage for Mr. Lawrence's chair. The boys leaped exultantly upon this, shouting their appreciation. With Ralph's help they then raised it, and fastened it by large hooks to the inside of the barge. They ran upon it, jumped, hopped, toppled, danced, trying it in every possible way. It bore their antics with undenial stability.

Now, they fetched their uncle's chair, the donkey-chair; it would run on with charming ease, and, the platform being railed, with perfect safety.

Now the donkey was marched across, with much human lugging and shoving, and much asinine inclination to kick, and deposited in the bottom of the boat.

Sober-grey and Ralph took charge, the boys tackled on in front, and off the procession started for the island. The chair stood in the after-part of the barge, on the small deck. It was confined to its place by poles run through its wheels, and lashed

to the sides of the boat, and by cross-poles outside the wheels. It could not have moved in a storm, Ralph declared, which, fortunately, they had no chance of trying! Arrived at the island, the platform was refixed, and found to rest very steadily on the levelled rock. The chair was rolled out, and along the road, with Ralph inside, who was much heavier than the proper occupant; and, when they reached a broad and secure spot, the donkey was fetched (with the same dumb and useless protestations on his part), harnessed in and driven triumphantly over the paths, as far as they were in sufficient order—this was to the green, the grave, the garden, the arbour, everywhere but the Peak and quarry. The cheers of the boys may be imagined, when the practicability of their wishes was thus proved beyond a doubt; and their longing to seize upon their uncle, and carry him off that very minute, was hard to withstand. But Ralph suggested some tidying and improving that they could do then and there, which partly reconciled them to the inevitable necessity of waiting till to-morrow. They returned as they went, in safety and triumph.



CHAPTER XVIII.

UNCLE AND AUNT ON THE WATER.

BUT who shall describe the distress of the next day, when the weather proved wet ! We would almost say that Mr. Lawrence was the most disappointed of all ; but perhaps his amusement at his own eagerness, and his hearty ridicule of himself, helped his companions to bear their grievous disappointment. Miss Lawrence, too, was much amused. She had never seen her brother in the least like this. He had always, apparently, lived patiently and contentedly on from day to day, with no active interests to disturb him ; and here he was, as bad as any boy, exciting himself over this expedition. He had even insisted on taking tea on the island ; and now this weather had stopped it all.

‘Boys !’ he exclaimed, ‘what are we to do ? I

feel too stupid to draw. I tell you what,—one of you shall read me out some story, and we will each draw a picture of it as we like, and then show our pictures to each other. Shall we? We can't sit still, looking at the rain; it really is too silly.'

The boys laughed, and brought their favourite Froissart. Out of it they read an animated description of a tournament, and then, shutting the book, they attempted to sketch the scene. Richard succeeded best of the boys. His sketch was full of spirit. Edward's knights and horses were all deformed; whilst Tommy's bore a strong resemblance to wooden toys, without even equalling these in beauty or symmetry. Mr. Lawrence made an extremely pretty picture, which he gave to Richard, as a reward for the latter's spirited sketch. And so the morning passed.

The afternoon cleared, but not enough to admit of their expedition. The boys still wondered what to do; until at length Dick hit upon the happy idea, that they would make some flags to commemorate their uncle's advent on the island! If they might only have some paste, and calico, coloured and white, in their own room, they would make such beauties! Miss Lawrence was only too happy to

get them thus away from her brother, and so to keep him quiet. She sent for the housekeeper, who readily volunteered to supply the young gentlemen with all they could need, and carried them off with her to inspect her stores. A large square of white calico was to make Dick's flag, which was to bear a red cross, with lions, bears, tigers, and no one can say what else. Tommy chose a blue flag, with gay-coloured chintz flowers and figures to be pasted on it. Edward selected a red square, of which he said he should make a Union Jack. This was a glorious thought of Dick's; it provided them with animated amusement for all the rest of the afternoon, and for the next morning too, since this again, unfortunately, proved too wet to allow of Mr. Lawrence leaving the mainland.

The housekeeper was obliged to assist the boys a little. Their devices were very difficult to shape; or, when shaped and cut out, to paste on straight. Then, one side of the flag being trimmed, it became very desirable to trim the reverse side alike, otherwise the devices showed very poorly through. Edward was astonished to find his Union Jack puzzle him extremely. He could not remember what it was like, until he found one in a picture.

This difficulty removed, the stripes would not lie straight ; they did try his patience sorely, but he succeeded fairly at last.

Tom began by edging his with a dark border. He then scattered little bunches of flowers all about, straight or crookedly, upright or topsy-turvy, as they would fit in, with heads and tails of birds, heads of men, etc. etc., dotted in as he could. His was a mightily gay flag, but he could attempt no second face—it was not possible to copy such a rigmarole. Dick's flag was adorned with wild beasts, with a crown in the centre of the cross. A lion rampant, with a tasselled tail ; a bear copied out of some natural history ; three tigers, tumbling one over another ; and a stag regardant, occupied its four quarters ; which he succeeded in repeating backwards on the opposite side.

These flags, after pasting, had to dry ; and their owners used the interval to get themselves staves whereon to nail them. These staves required cutting and shaping ; but by the time the weather cleared, and it was pronounced safe for Mr. Lawrence to make his grand attempt, the flags were done, and stuck in their respective boats, ready to do full honour to the occasion. The boys adorned

themselves also with sashes and belts, with cockades and feathers in their caps, and started in ample time to get everything in order before their aunt and Sober-grey, with the chair containing its precious occupant, should make their appearance on the wharf. They had been to the island in the morning to clear away any rummage that the rain had caused. Poor Richard groaned over his little success; but he also prepared with heartiness quite equal to his brothers, to welcome their uncle and aunt on the island.

It was on Saturday afternoon the 5th of June, nearly a month since the news of her approaching fate had so dismayed Miss Lawrence, that she accompanied her brother on this memorable expedition to the island. They left the house at 2.30 in the afternoon; and, it having been arranged that they should drink tea on the island, they carried with them provision and wraps enough for a week. Such an event had not occurred for forty years, or thereabouts, that these two sober people should quit their home for the very questionable comforts of a water excursion and a picnic! It had been a great question with Miss Lawrence what she should wear: she feared mud or dust, heat or cold; she was

uncertain which. But, after a consultation with her housekeeper, she put on a comparatively old dust-coloured merino, a grey silk mantle (she carried a shawl), a grey quaker's bonnet, such as she wore on damp excursions among the cottages round, and an 'ugly,' which latter was Tommy's abhorrence. She shod herself in thick walking-boots, carrying galoshes. She did think of carrying also a change of shoes in case of an upset, but it struck her that such a catastrophe would probably involve too much wetting for dry shoes to be of use. A small umbrella completed her preparations.

Her brother she would have cased in coats and waterproofs and galoshes ; but he laughed, fidgeted, and finally refused them all—though they were, nevertheless, carried. He insisted on wearing his usual evening dress for his 'constitutionals,' nor would he listen to her warning, that it might be 'so cold on the water.'

Well ! the chair came to the door, and the party started precisely at 2.30 on that 5th of June. It was a lovely afternoon : a bright sun warmed them, and no treacherous wind blew to chill them. The country was looking beautiful, and Mr. Lawrence at least felt like a child let loose for play. He had

no anxiety whatever on the score of his trip, but great amusement at watching his own excitement about it. They drove down the entrance into the yard, and approached the wharf. There lay the flotilla, awaiting their arrival ;—the barge, with its platform, and its attendant Ralph, who, in compliance with his young masters' eager request, had adorned his old black hat with a gay ribbon and flower. There were the boys all betrimmed, with their boats beflagged, all eager excitement and joy. They cheered their uncle lustily as he approached, and then sprang forward to assist in getting him on board, crowding and bustling round the chair, till Sober-grey was forced to cry out, 'Be aisy now, young gen'lemen ; dont'e fluster the master so !'

But it was hardly possible for the boys to be 'aisy.' The donkey was unharnessed in a minute, and driven on board, with an amount of noise and disputation that rather shook poor Miss Lawrence's nerves, already in a state of excitement. Then, soberly, with no shouting, but with great care, uncle and the chair were wheeled on board, and firmly secured. Aunt followed, and took her seat in an arm-chair prepared for her. Then the platform was pushed in, the boys sprang into their

tubs, and, with much clamour, off they pushed. It was not easy to start the barge, but by the help of Ralph's exertions on board it was done; and once off, the dragging—*towing*, I beg pardon—was not difficult.

Mr. Lawrence murmured to his sister as they passed along, 'Just one month to-morrow, sister, since we heard the lads were coming. What pleasure they have given us, instead of the worry we anticipated!'

'Yes, brother,' replied Miss Lawrence in a less satisfied tone; 'so they have. But I hope they won't upset us!'

There was no fear of this. They would have been clever to upset that steady old barge. The only fear was the landing on the island. Cautiously enough was the barge brought up to the desired spot, and firmly was it fastened there. Then, with equal care, the platform was again fixed, the chair freed, and rolled along it to the levelled rock, along the road to the foot of the path. Safe! safe! In silence, with but few muttered directions and remarks, had the transit been made. Now the boys' rapture knew no bounds. They yelled, shouted, and skipped round the chair in uncontrollable de-

light—a delight shared now by both uncle and aunt. The donkey came trotting up by this time, and took its place, to drag Mr. Lawrence up the hill. The first spot he visited was of course the green, and much indeed did he admire it. A shawl was spread on the oak bank, but he would not leave his chair. He was safer there, he said, and more comfortable : he would play no tricks, or he might be unable to come again. Miss Lawrence, however, seated herself. She had been helped up the hill by her two squires, Ted and Tommy, and being accustomed to a fair amount of walking, she had no reason to feel tired ; but the excitement she had experienced was unusual, and she was very glad to sit down and enjoy the pretty scene before her.

After a short pause they proceeded to the grave, where Fanny's tomb was duly admired, and the sorrows of her young owners duly pitied. Mr. Lawrence knew none of them, as they had all left the house before he took possession ; nor could he tell their history with any certainty. He believed the sons had entered professions, and he supposed the daughters had married, but he knew nothing really about them. He saw the arbour, or rather

the site where it was to be, which he much admired also. As to the progress of the work, he was of course no judge, not having seen the spot from the first. The garden was the most finished job, and it excited the high approval of both uncle and aunt. The latter took a keen interest in it, and began planning it out with Tommy. She seated herself on a camp-stool in its midst, and began to sketch a plan of it, whilst Tommy squatted himself by her side to watch her progress.

'Here ought to be this flower, and here ought to be that ; and will you plant them if I give them to you ?'

'Yes, indeed, and that Tommy would.'

'But the water ? You must find the water.'

'There's the gutter,' said Tommy.

Miss Lawrence laughed. 'That is not the water,' she replied. 'But I daresay you can find the water. Evidently it must have been there, or the gutter would have been useless.'

'Edward and I are going to look for it on Monday,' Tommy said. 'We could not before ; we have been clearing the paths for you.'

'You have not so very much more to do before Mr. Talbot returns,' remarked Mr. Lawrence to

Edward. ‘Your arbour is ready to be put up, and your paths are done. I should think it ought to be well finished in a fortnight.’

‘I think so too,’ replied Edward. ‘But we shall want Ralph’s help on Monday, uncle. I do not think we can fix those posts firmly by ourselves. If we might have him on Monday, I should think we might fix the whole framework of the arbour. Then Tommy and I could easily finish it alone.’

‘Do you think you could put up the framework of that arbour in one day, Ralph?’

‘In two, sir,’ replied Ralph.

‘Then you give up Monday and Tuesday to it. And see that you fix it very firmly. The posts should be tarred, I think.’

‘Yes, sir; at bottom they ought.’

‘Very well; you make it all steady and strong. I am sure the boys deserve help, when they have worked so well themselves. Where is Dick, Edward? I want to see his castle.’

Dick came reluctantly forward. ‘You can’t get up there, uncle. It is not done enough. It is such a long job.’

‘But may I not see the site?’

‘No, uncle, you can’t get there; the paths are

too narrow. I could not widen them, and do the castle and all.'

'What a pity! Well, I must see them next time. Are you trying to do the work all alone? Why don't your brothers help you?'

'He will not let us,' said Edward.

'Oh you silly boy! You will soon tire of that, I expect.'

'I want it to be all my own doing,' said Dick.

By this time the tea was spread, and a comfortable, merry meal they had. Soon after, the preparations commenced for departure. The return was managed with as great success as the arrival; and by six the whole party were safely ensconced at The Refuge—that is to say, uncle and aunt, Sober-grey, the donkey and chair. The boys remained a short while longer with Ralph, to assist in putting away all that had been used during the afternoon. They at length returned to the house to partake of the sort of supper-tea that was to reward them after all their exertions. Oh, how busily their tongues did chatter, and how hungry they were, and how happy they were! Mr. Lawrence was already planning for another expedition, when Mr. Talbot should come. Nor did Miss

Lawrence offer any objection ; but, poor soul, she was dreadfully tired, and very glad when the chatter ceased, and she could withdraw to her own room for repose.

Mr. Lawrence, too, felt very weary and exhausted. He had not passed such a day of excitement and pleasure for years ; but his poor, weak frame felt it, by painful fatigue, and he also was only too thankful when bed-time came.

Monday, Tuesday, and indeed Wednesday, were occupied by Ralph in raising the posts and roof of Master Edward's arbour. The work took him all the three days ; for there was much to do, and Mr. Lawrence's orders were decisive that it should be well done. First of all, he employed himself in shaping the posts exactly right, setting the boys to daub all their lower ends with pitch ; a most congenial and delightful employment. Then he set up each post in its hole, charging the boys to steady it upright until he had well rammed in the earth round its base. A large post stood at each corner, and smaller posts between ; two of which were shortened for the windows. This took Monday and part of Tuesday. By Tuesday evening the main joists of the roof were firmly fixed to the

post-heads, and by Wednesday the rafters were added, with the window-sills and upper door-post and threshold ; so the frame of the arbour was complete. Ralph's advice to the boys, as he left them that night, was to paint all the wood-work up, well all over, before doing anything else. 'The paint,' he said, 'was ready, because Mr. Lawrence had ordered it.'

It may readily be believed that such advice as this was very charming to the boys. When are boys or girls ever so happy as when daubing about with a paint-brush—the bigger the better? But both brothers declared that they would, and must, have Richard to help. He would have no painting in his castle, poor fellow, and come he must now. They attacked him eagerly, just to join them for one day; it would be such a pity to miss so glorious a chance of a mess: he really must come. And Richard did consent, after a fair amount of pressing; he was, truth to say, getting horribly tired of his castle. He had been more steady to his work for a while; but he had set himself such a tremendous task, and he was so obstinate about working alone, that it was no wonder if hope almost failed him. However, he joined his brothers for one day; and during

that day the arbour frame was painted a darkish green,—no, no, I am wrong, a lead colour,—since this is the first coat for green. Thus two paintings were necessitated instead of one—so much the better.

Richard enjoyed his day of companionship extremely, and was almost shaken in his determination to toil on his peak alone. The boys represented to him eagerly that they could not touch the arbour whilst it was wet, and that so they might just as well help him. They had a little work to do in Tommy's garden, but it would not take them long, and need not be done at once ; he had better accept their help. But still Richard answered, ‘No—no ; he would finish alone.’

‘You never will, you never can,’ said Edward ; ‘you won’t have done by the time Mr. Talbot comes.’

‘Yes, I will. I don’t want help, Edward.’

There was no forcing it upon him, therefore the boys pursued their own plans. They planted the various flowers and shrubs their aunt had given Tommy, and they went a-foraging after the water. They soon found the spring, which was, however, running all the wrong way, and entailed some

trouble upon them, in the shape of banking and clearing, before they could divert it to its old channel. They succeeded at length, when a pretty little brook came bubbling down the gutter, filling the basin, then overflowing and running on into the wood. Tommy sent a whole fleet of sticks and straws floating down it ; and he fancied little harbours, and he planned a real little boat, flat-bottomed, because the water was so shallow. Indeed I am much afraid that for the time being he cared more about his gutter and its stream than he did about his garden, and all the good plants his aunt had given him,—only for a time, for he was very fond of his garden. But the boat was made, and given a mast, with a white paper sail and a red flag ; and she made many very safe voyages down, but she would never sail up, in spite of all Tommy's persuasions. He found it far easier to carry her up and launch her afresh for her downward voyage.



CHAPTER XIX.

DICK CONQUERED.

IT wanted but a week and a day or two to Mr. Talbot's return. The two boys determined that the arbour should be finished beforehand. There still remained all the laths to be fastened on, the moss to be stuffed in, and the thatch to be put on. A good deal to finish in a week! But the laths were lying ready, and the boys began with a will to nail them on. It was decided that they should lie diagonally from post to post in one direction between each pair of posts outside, and in the opposite direction inside; for laths must be fastened on within and without, that the moss might rest between. Ralph said, to make everything very tidy, there should be battens placed outside the laths' ends; but this could wait until the arbour was walled and roofed. The work,

unfortunately, proved rather beyond little Tom's powers. He hammered his fingers most unmercifully ; and though he might not have minded that overmuch, he could not keep his laths even or nails upright, do what he would. Edward was obliged to finish one division, and set Tommy on a chair to stuff in the moss. This was troublesome work, because the width between was not very great, and the moss would stick half-way, leaving all the bottom bare ; whilst Tommy was afraid to poke at it through the laths, for fear of unfastening them. He complained to his brother at last, who was quite puzzled how to remove the difficulty. But, to prevent its recurrence, he nailed henceforth only a foot or two in height at once, and by this means enabled Tommy almost to push down the stuffing with his hands, or, at worst, with the help only of a very short stick. After this the work progressed rapidly.

At length Tommy began to get very tired of it, and after one or two good yawns and a wide stretch he suggested that he had better go and see after Dick. Edward looked down from his ladder in surprise and chagrin :

' Oh, why, Tommy ! we want to get it done.'

'But I am *so* tired,' pleaded poor Tom. 'I have been stuffing, stuffing, stuffing for you all day long, Edward.'

'It is quite early yet, Tommy ; you must go on. I must finish all this side to-day to half-way behind. Then we can do the rest to-morrow, and there will be only the roof left.'

'All this side up to *there!*' repeated the little boy. 'It is such a lot, Edward, and I am tired of it.'

'Well, Tommy, you can go ; but I have helped you a great deal. I have not been tired over your work ; but you can go. I want no unwilling worker,' said Edward sublimely.

Tommy looked very disconsolate ; but he toiled on for a while—a very short while ; then his fatigue quite overpowered him, and he threw down his moss and his sticks, declaring that he must go. Edward would not answer him ; so Tommy, feeling cross and unhappy, loitered slowly away. And Edward continued to labour alone, but not happily ; for he felt, rather than acknowledged to himself, that he had been harsh to his little brother. And there is nothing hinders brightness and zeal in one's work like a smothered sense of wrongdoing.

Tommy dawdled away towards the peak to seek for Richard—not that this was exactly his object, but he was in disgrace with Ted ; and as this poisoned all the lower land to him, he sought his brother on the hill. Tom had not been there for nearly a week, and he was surprised, on reaching it, to find no more signs of completion than he had left at his last visit. More débris lay about. Something of a fair-sized heap of stones had been gathered near the foundation-lines, and these lines were more defined and deeper ; but to Tommy's eyes the castle was as far off as ever. Dick's head could be seen over the rising ground, bending over his excavations, as he swayed his heavy pick-axe. Tommy approached him, and was concerned to see how tired he looked.

'He is working much harder than I have,' thought the penitent child ; 'yet I am sure he is a great deal more tired.'

'Dick !' he said at length, 'do you think you will ever have done ?'

'I don't know !' exclaimed Dick, looking up, and answering a question that was often in his own mind.

'If I get my own spade, couldn't I dig out a

little as you pick-axe?' inquired Tom. 'I'll go and fetch it,' added he, as Richard did not refuse; and he shot off, for fear Dick should remember to say *no*.

He fetched his spade, hearing the click of Ted's hammer as he did so—a sound that made him feel very faithless. But he hurried back, and began busily to dig away the rubbish that Dick was 'pick-axeing' up, as Tom called it. The boys worked on in silence for several minutes. Dick was permitting what he had persistently declared he never would, and it required some time to reconcile him to this inconsistency. He was very glad of his brother's help, but he did not approve of himself. So Tom worked on, without any remark from Dick; and he was not bold enough to speak first. At last Dick watched his energetic doings for a minute, and then said:

'You'll tire yourself, Tommy.'

'Oh, dear no,' cried Tommy, looking up. 'Shan't I be a great help to you, Dick?'

'I don't know,' replied the latter ungraciously. How could he be expected to acknowledge it so soon!

And Tommy toiled on again, rather daunted.

At length Dick dashed down his pickaxe: 'Tis of no use!' he exclaimed. 'I must be everybody's laughing-stock. I can't finish it. I shan't try any more!' And he walked away a little distance, struggling with his tears.

Tommy stood looking after him in puzzle and dismay. Follow him he scarcely dared just then; and, glancing round on the apparently purposeless rummage scattered about, he could not help feeling that Dick's words were painfully true. In these circumstances, what was Tommy to do? He be-thought him of Edward, his general comforter and referee in his mother's absence. But he had displeased Edward himself; and, moreover, toiling against time as Ted was, it was hard to ask him to stop and help his obstinate brother. But Dick just then made a motion as if dashing away a tear, and the sight proved too much for little Tommy. He noiselessly laid down his spade, and softly crept off to seek his elder brother. Dick's feelings certainly were not to be envied. He was half conscious how much of obstinacy and pride had mingled with perseverance in his refusal of help, and bitterly conscious of the entire failure of all his vaunts and extravagance. He wandered on to a

spot where he was alone, and, sitting down, he burst into tears.

In the meantime Tommy had returned to Edward, whose better spirit had returned to him. He greeted Tom brightly and kindly as soon as he was aware of his presence; which was not, however, for some seconds, the timid little fellow standing still, without venturing to speak.

'Well, Tommy,' he said, 'how is Dick getting on?'

'He is crying fit to break his heart, I believe,' said Tommy solemnly, who had caught sight of Dick's burst of distress as he lost him in the wood.

Edward paused in surprise. 'Dick crying! What for?'

'He can't get on. He is tired up there all alone; and he has given up his castle.'

'Oh Tommy, it must not be!' exclaimed Edward, jumping down. 'Here!' looking reluctantly round on his own unfinished work; 'we'll go and help him.'

'Oh Edward, then you won't get done?'

'Yes, yes; I daresay I will. I am getting tired too.'

'Are you?' cried Tommy joyfully. 'I'm so

glad, Edward,' he continued, as the two strode up the hill. 'I am afraid I was very lazy just now.'

'Perhaps you were a little,' replied his elder brother; 'but you had been worked a good deal, and you are very little, you know, Tommy.'

'Yes,' said Tommy meekly. 'Here's Dick. We are come to help you, Dick.'

'Whether you like it or not,' added the elder. 'So come and tell us what is to be done.'

'It is of no use,' said Dick despondingly,—'of no use at all. It is more than can be done.'

'Nonsense!' cried Edward. 'What is it you want?'

'These are the foundations. They have to be one foot wide and one foot deep all round, and they are a hundred and twenty feet long.'

'Whew!' whistled Edward. 'We must begin at once, then. You want a ditch round here, you mean?'

'A ditch—foundations,' said Dick, unwilling, even in his humiliation, to give up his grand words.

'Oh, well! what you please. Now we must dig as fast as we can.'

And all three set to work with the shovel and

the spade and the pickaxe. After a few minutes, Edward exclaimed: 'Do change with me, Dick, and give me the pickaxe. I never touched such hard stuff in my life.'

'Do you wonder that I could not get on alone, then?' inquired Dick as he complied with his request.

'No, of course; I only wonder that you ever tried.'

And the crestfallen Dick remembered how often help had been offered to him and refused.

For about an hour the boys toiled on, till they really were extremely tired. Edward then said that he thought Ralph had better be asked to help them. 'It really is too hard for us, all this part; and he would soon finish it.'

Dick very reluctantly consented. But he had been so evidently beaten, and the certainty of exposure when Mr. Talbot came was so clear, that he was obliged to give way. If the foundations were once dug, and his brothers would help him, there was not so hopeless or impossible a task before him.

It was now time to return to the house, and the boys packed up accordingly.

'Ted,' whispered Tommy, 'when will you finish your own?'

'Some time,' replied Ted in the same tone. 'But Dick has nothing to show yet. We must help him; but it is very provoking that he has kept us so long.'

'Very,' responded Tommy.



CHAPTER XX.

FOUNDATION FROLIC.

HIIS new call upon his efforts required an entirely new arrangement of Edward's time. He had reflected with delight that Tom's garden was finished ; the paths and landing-place also were done ; the grave had been put in order from the first ; and that nothing remained but his own arbour, which might therefore occupy him exclusively, and be brought to perfection before Mr. Talbot came. Now here was a longer, harder job than any cropping up at the last minute, all behindhand, and requiring all their energy to get it even presentably finished in time. And all owing, Edward felt, to Dick's pertinacity in refusing help ; for the time he had wasted in fruitless efforts would, if spent in combination with his brothers, have brought all their work to com-

pletion. It was very trying. But Edward did not like to twit Richard with his wilfulness in this hour of mortification. So there seemed no help for it but to set to work, heart and soul, about the castle, and leave the arbour to shift for itself, for some days at least.

And for two days Edward acted resolutely, if, as might be well excused, the least bit moodily upon this conviction. The result was very satisfactory. Ralph had been obtained, and the ditch was more than half finished. The stones already dug were most of them conveyed to the place of building and lime was carried to the island in the shape of mortar ready mixed—one load only as yet.

When Tommy, whose uneasiness about the arbour could no longer be withstood, told Dick all about it,—how Edward had given up his darling scheme, and never said a word, and how the time of Mr. Talbot's coming was approaching, and the arbour would be unfinished, and Edward would never say why,—Dick's generous feelings were all aroused. He sprang upon Edward, and insisted on his work being instantly stopped, and his tools dropped, to Edward's utter surprise, who had had no intimation of what his youngest brother had been at.

'It shall not be, Edward. I have been a bad, selfish fellow; but I did not know about your arbour. That *shall* be done first. It **SHALL**!'

'Be quiet, Dick!' exclaimed Edward as he was forcibly dragged from his stool and nearly thrown down. 'Be quiet, I say. How are we to finish the arbour, and this too? Let me go.'

'No! It is my castle. I won't have another stroke done till the arbour is finished. You are too good, Edward. It would be a shame.'

'It *is* a shame to knock a fellow about like this, I think. And just for helping you!' cried Edward, regaining his shovel.

'Now do, Edward, stop. I shall hate my castle. I shall indeed. Do stop, and go to the arbour. I will help, if I may.'

Edward hesitated. 'Then this won't be done,' he said.

'Never mind. It is my fault. The arbour ought to be done.'

'I think,' remarked Ralph, who had been watching the dispute between the young gentlemen,—'I think Master Richard is quite right: the arbour ought to be done first. I should not try to finish this. I should leave the foundation-stone to be

laid when Mr. Talbot comes (you young gentlemen will want something to do when all the rest is done), and finish the arbour now.'

'Yes; that's it! that's just it! Now, Edward, we can have a grand day, you know, with the old flags and new ones; and uncle or aunt, or some one, can lay the stone properly; and we can make a procession all right. It will be almost better than if the castle were done.'

'And so I may go to the arbour. Come, then!' exclaimed Edward, with a glee that showed how great a restraint he had put upon himself by abstaining from it for so long. The shovel and pick-axe were immediately dropped, and the boys dashed off. Tommy did not forget his spade, but ran after his flying brothers, dragging it along behind him.

Ralph was left alone in the ditch. 'Well,' he muttered, 'I've got half a day to spare. I may as well finish these diggings. But what a wonderful thing fancy is, or whatever they call it! Master Richard's as pleased about this foundation frolic as if the castle was built. A' well, I don't see that 'tisn't just as much good! But it was wonderful kind of Master Edward; and I do think the arbour

ought to be done first. Besides, that is of some use. As for this roofless, good-for-nothing castle, as he calls it, it would not matter a stiver if it all came to nought!' With which complimentary observation Ralph dug on, and succeeded in completing Richard's ditch that evening.

Richard was now thoroughly roused, and he worked with an energy that astonished his brother. He felt, indeed, that both his honour and his peace of mind were involved in the arbour's being finished by Mr. Talbot's arrival. He had not, it was true, known of Edward's generosity; but none the less ought he to have inquired, and not have occupied all his brothers' time, so close as they were upon the day for completion. He nailed, and he hammered, and he sawed quicker than Edward could keep up with him, or than Tommy could stuff. Indeed Tommy complained more than once that he could not overtake the work his brothers gave him, by filling in so many of the sides. Ere long they were obliged to stop and stuff with him, or the difficulty of the first side would have been repeated. By the next day all the laths were fixed, and the moss in, sides and roof; and all that now remained to do were the thatching and the painting.

Ralph—that universal genius—was to teach them to thatch. And straw, or reed rather, they were to carry across the next morning. This would be Friday. And marvellously were their movements quickened by a letter from Mr. Talbot that arrived by the morning's post, to say that he and Mrs. Talbot would arrive on the Tuesday following by the five o'clock train.

Heigh, ho ! Though they had known this all along, it seemed like a fresh piece of news. Friday for thatching, Saturday for painting, Sunday for drying, Monday for clearing and tidying generally,—Richard's paths too,—Tuesday morning for a last look, Tuesday afternoon for fetching Mr. and Mrs. Talbot ; for which purpose they might have the donkey-cart under their own charge, whilst the servant took the carriage—not the dog-cart—which had fetched them. They felt inexpressibly inspired and hustled, and they scrambled off to the island as if the whole course of nature depended on their exertions. Ralph was provokingly sober. But then he had thatched before. Besides, seated in his ‘Adroit Assistance,’ he could push her through the water, one stroke to their three, faster than they could. And furthermore, Ralph had done many

a hard day's work in his time, and he knew that a bustling beginning was likely to make a faint ending.

Chi va piano, va sano ; chi va sano, va lontano,
(He who goes quietly, goes safely ; he who goes safely, goes far),

Ralph would have said if he had known Italian ; but though not knowing it, he acted upon it. So he allowed the young gentlemen to fume, and he followed them calmly.

Whoever has read the amusing description in Miss Edgeworth's Frank, of the attempt of the latter to thatch his arbour, will understand the difficulties that our 'boys had to encounter ;—how sometimes the reed would lie in bundles and lumps, with holes between for the rain to run through ; how it refused to lie straight, or overlap tidily, but would look like badly cut hair, all ridges and rows, instead of one even, rich-looking surface ; and how Ralph had to 'keep on' perpetually calling out to his pupils, 'Now, Master Edward, be steady. Look what a lump you're laying, on there ;' and, 'Master Richard, if you'd carry half as much you'd get on twice as fast ;' and, 'Master Tommy, I can most see through your thatch ;' and how, after a long time of excitement, followed by a season of enforced sobriety, the same Ralph pronounced the arbour to

be thatched very fairly, and proceeded to trim off the edges, and put the finishing strokes to the work.

It was an uncommonly pretty arbour, as it stood there in its secluded nook, surrounded by trees, backed by the rocky bank almost higher than itself, and covered with moss and ferns, and commanding a view over Tommy's pretty garden to the trees and water beyond. Edward was enchanted, and no great wonder!

'It wants the battens at the corners,' he said, 'and painting, and that is all.'

'Well, sir, I've brought the battens, and I can nail them on at once. I thought it best to make them when I began to fancy you would not finish in time.'

'Oh, thank you, Ralph, thank you! You are a jolly old brick. And to-morrow we'll paint.'

'Suppose we come now and see about my paths?' said Dick. 'We shall only just have time.'

His brothers willingly consented. The usual path leading to the peak was very hilly, almost in steps for some few yards. It would be impossible to get Mr. Lawrence up by it; and if he did not come, half their pleasure would be lost. They were much puzzled what to do, because, independently of

the shortness of the time, it would spoil a very pretty path to widen and open this. After some consideration and looking about, they hit upon another, apparently a cart-road to the quarry, which wound about the hill lower down. It passed through the trees, and seemed to overhang the river, though it was at a perfectly safe distance from the edge of the hill. It reached the quarry about half-way towards the peak. And if Mr. Lawrence could get no farther, he was not two stones'-throw from the top there ; but if there were time, it could be carried on. Yet they rather doubted whether it would be safe for the donkey-chair. And Ralph, when consulted, said decidedly ' No—not with master inside.'

This was a disappointment, but still it could not be helped. However, when Mr. Lawrence heard of the difficulty, he said that he had a sort of hand-chair with poles, which was perfectly safe, and in that he would be carried to the top. He would not be stopped ; he would not stay below. Especially, after all Tommy had told him of the boys' doings about the castle and the arbour, he must see it all for himself. So this was well settled.



CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

WE must hasten on. Tuesday afternoon arrived at last, and all was ready. Saturday had seen the arbour painted, Monday had seen the road cleared. The visit that morning (of Tuesday) had ensured everything being in the best order; and the afternoon found the boys, in tidy clothes, seated in the donkey-cart by about half-past three, though the carriage was not to follow till half-past four, and whipping their good little steed towards the railway station. How much they had to talk of, and how they did talk too, of something or other! But no one could forget the difficulties one and all had been in before Mr. Talbot's last visit, and the general comfort and pleasure now.

Of course they got to the station, ages too soon;

and of course they wandered about, thinking no train ever was so slow, and safely prophesying that the carriage would be late. But no ; it drove leisurely up, with full ten minutes to spare. At last the whistle was heard, the smoke was seen, and the great long wormlike thing came rumbling up to the platform. Then out jumped Mr. Talbot, and handed out his wife. They were instantly surrounded by the boys with so hearty a welcome, that you would almost have thought it was some near and dear relatives they were receiving. So valued and so valuable is judicious sympathy!

I am not sure that Mr. Talbot would not have preferred the cart, with the boys, to the carriage. But of course that would never do. Besides, the idea of poor Mrs. Talbot making her *entrée* at The Refuge alone! So these two departed in the carriage with due dignity, and the boys rattled after in their trap. All reached the house within ten minutes of each other. But we need not stop to describe the welcome given to the Talbots, nor the dinner, nor the conversation afterwards.

The next morning saw Mr. Talbot in his tub rowing off to the island, with all the boys paddling around him. He was really astonished to see the

progress made ; and surprised when Ralph assured him that so much of it had been real work, done by the boys themselves. Ralph could tell him exactly how much he had himself effected, so there could be no mistake about the boys' performances. Mr. Talbot said they were very creditable to such little fellows, and that he should write and tell Colonel Lawrence so, though he had not the pleasure of knowing him.

'Oh ! Uncle Lawrence had written often,' the boys said.

'And have not you ? Oh fie ! My dear boys, you must. Let it be a Sunday's task always. It will soon be a pleasure.'

The boys duly promised ; and hurried him on to the castle, where Richard described to him the project of laying the foundation-stone 'properly,' into which he fully entered. He was delighted to hear that Mr. and Miss Lawrence had been to the island, and very much surprised.

'It is about the very last thing that I should have expected,' he said. 'Who put it into their heads ?'

'Nobody,' the boys said. 'Uncle thought of it for himself, and he was as eager as could be about it ; almost as eager as you, Mr. Talbot.'

'As eager as I!' repeated that gentleman. 'Why, I am a most sober person—never eager at all.'

'Oh!' cried the boys; 'we know better than that.'

Mr. Talbot returned with his young conductors to luncheon; after which the boys were despatched out-of-doors after some of their own devices, whilst the four elders remained for a chat in the comfortable sitting-room. Mr. Talbot then heard more in detail,—all the proceedings that had taken place in his absence; of Dick's talent, but want of perseverance, and of his wilfulness in refusing help,—so utterly conquered, both by the unconscious sweetness and sympathy of little Tommy, and by the generous self-denial of Edward. But full justice was done to Dick's conduct about the arbour, when he at last discovered his brothers' kindness.

'He might do anything, that boy, if he would only think,' exclaimed Mr. Talbot. 'He is an uncommonly imaginative, clever fellow; but so giddy!'

'I would far rather lean on Edward,' replied Mr. Lawrence. 'He is much slower, but entirely trustworthy. Whatever he sees to be right, or says that he will do, he does, however difficult, however distasteful. He is a noble fellow, though, it may be, a slow one.'

'And I will back my little Tommy,' exclaimed Miss Lawrence, 'to be the kindest, gentlest, sweetest child that ever was. How his mother could leave him, I can't think!'

'You don't find three boys such a fearful infliction after all, then, Miss Lawrence?'

'No, Mr. Talbot; but I must have done so, if you had not come to our assistance. We were all misunderstanding each other before you came.'

'Yes, indeed we cannot be too grateful to you,' said her brother. 'But what a source of pleasure the boys are to me now, I cannot describe. I shall miss them sadly when they leave for school!—Have you heard of this project of Dick's about his castle?'

'About laying the foundation-stone? Oh yes. He wants us all to be there and lay it in state, I understand. And he wants more flags, he says.'

'I will help him to make some,' exclaimed Mrs. Talbot. 'I have made so many, both for my own children and the school, that I consider myself quite an adept in the art.'

Here the carriage came round, in which Mr. Talbot was to drive his wife and Miss Lawrence to a distant and real castle that was considered worth seeing; and the party dispersed to dress, leaving

Mr. Lawrence to rest. As they drove through the gate they saw Dick astride on the donkey, endeavouring to teach it to curvet. He had encumbered it with trappings, in the shape of a couple of cloths, which swept the ground ; adorned its headpiece with a waving branch for a plume, and tied its head in tight, that it might arch its neck properly. Not with complete success ; and the donkey was flogging itself with its own tail, longing to kick. But what the result was, the carriageful did not stop to see.

'Flags! flags! many and gay. Oh, I will help you !' cried Mrs. Talbot on the following morning, when the boys' projects were being discussed. 'What sort do you want ? Mottoes or devices ?'

'Not mottoes !' exclaimed one voice. 'They are ugly, stupid, "methody" things.'

'Nonsense !' returned the lady. 'They need be none of the three. What do you say to such as "Faint heart never won fair lady," "Never say die," "Well begun is half done," eh ?'

'I don't like that last,' growled Richard.

'But the others you do ? And even the last you may like, if you consider the beginning to be, not the first move, but the start well accomplished.'

'Which is nearly tantamount to saying, Half done is half done!' said her husband.

'No, no, Edward,' returned she; 'no such thing. A twenty-mile ride is not half done when you leave your own door; but if you start with your preparations complete, your horse in good order, and yourself in good spirits, the probability is that your ride will be prosperous. I always consider this motto as sister to "Tarry a bit, that you may make an end the sooner," and "The longest way round is the shortest way there."

'Oh well, it may be so. But, boys, you have three flags. How many do you want?'

'They belong to the boats,' replied the boys.

'You can bring them up, and that will be one each. Are we all to carry flags? It will be an immense trouble, you know.'

But the boys looked so much as if they would like it, that their good-natured elders laughed and consented; inquiring again who were to choose the flags, when the boys suggested that each should choose their own.

'I will have my motto, then,' said Mrs. Talbot, 'in orange letters on a blue ground, if I can. Nobody shall say that I am not gay.'

a hard day's work in his time, and he knew that a bustling beginning was likely to make a faint ending.

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'Never mind. Your mottoes will express the other half, over and over!'

'What is Ralph to have?'

Nobody could tell; and it was decided that he had better be asked. So Dick and Tommy ran off to see for him, and find out. He was in his shop, very busy planing, and finishing some of the work, which the boys' demands on his time had left incomplete.

He looked up as the boys entered, and listened with a cool grin to the tremendous description that Dick poured upon him of all the wonders to be on this day of laying the stone. Then to the question what his flag should be, he replied, "'Taint all gold as glitters," if I must have one.'

Dick was disgusted. He tried hard to impress upon Ralph that this well-nigh insulting motto, thus applied, threw a doubt on all the glories surrounding it, and was entirely out of keeping with every other flag. But the old man was not to be moved.

'No, no,' he said. 'It is all very well to rush on and be always doing, and quite right to do what you've made your mind up to; but for all that, it's just as well to consider what the "*valey*" is of what

you're doing. No, if I'm to choose, I'll have that, and no other.'

Thus answered, Dick had no resource but to carry back his message, and it caused more laughter than he at all approved of. Mrs. Talbot declared at once that she would make the flag, and that she thought the old man's wisdom very appropriate. To poor Richard the whole affair was such sober earnest, that he did not at all like so much fun and ridicule concerning it ; but as he could not help himself, he was forced to submit.

So the ladies and the housekeeper set to work making these flags, with calico and paper and paste. Suddenly it was suggested that Mrs. Robins and Matilda Letitia might accompany the party. The boys paused in surprise : it seemed magnifying it so amazingly, to disturb all household work by admitting these two. But they recovered themselves immediately, and vociferously petitioned for Mrs. Robins. Her niece was a perfect nonentity in their eyes, but Mrs. Robins was deservedly regarded as a good friend. Even to Matilda Letitia they would be glad to make up by this uncommon pleasure for the dirty walk they had given her. So Miss Lawrence agreed that both should be of the party.

'Two more flags!' exclaimed Mrs. Talbot.
'When is this party to be?'

'On Saturday next?' asked Miss Lawrence of her brother and the boys.

'Yes; and if that afternoon is wet, on Monday.'
'There's plenty of time, then. What motto will you choose, Mrs. Robins?'

Mrs. Robins did not know nor care, neither did Matilda; so these were given some device instead. The flags proved most gay and bright, and were pronounced by the boys to be charming.

We need scarcely say with what impatience they waited for Saturday; but their intervening time was somewhat filled up by necessary preparations. *The* stone had to be lifted and placed, a clean trowel to be provided, also a mason's rule, also some mortar. Then they discovered that Ralph was making a table and some stools for the arbour—much to his chagrin, who had meant to surprise them, but infinitely to their delight; and they watched the completion of this furniture with the utmost eagerness.

So passed the time until Saturday came. The order of procession of the principal people was to be similar to that observed at Mr. Lawrence's first

visit to the island. It was perhaps necessary to get Mrs. Robins and Matilda over first, because of laying out the feast, and because Mrs. Robins felt very shy of going with her master and mistress. But a little consideration convinced everybody that one trip would do ; and at 2.30 this trip was made, with as complete success as before. Mrs. Talbot had to be introduced to the island, and the uncle and aunt to the improvements and advancements effected since they were last there. But all this was soon accomplished.

Then the great business of the day commenced. Richard mounted his donkey, for which he had provided some gay crimson trappings. He wore a smart paper cocked hat, as did his brothers, albeit none such were worn by the knights of old. But perhaps he had not yet gone back to the era of castles, though laying a foundation-stone might be supposed to precede it. He carried his flag—so did Ralph, provokingly close to him ; his brothers followed. His aunt and Mrs. Talbot, using theirs for alpenstocks up the little steep bit, came climbing after them. Mr. Talbot, with his flag aloft, not very decidedly (I am half afraid he forgot the importance of the occasion), accompanied Mr. Lawrence, who

in his sort of hand-barrow, poor man, yet looking very happy, bore his flag boldly stuck up by his side. He was carried round by the road, and then up the hill, where they all met. Here lay the stone and the mortar and the trowel, and Miss Lawrence advanced to perform the ceremony. It was impossible that this stone should be slung in a framework, after the manner of all fashionable foundation-stones : it was propped up so as to fall easily into its soft bed, as soon as this bed should be duly spread and smoothed over. Edward and Thomas (too important an affair this for ‘Tommy’) stood at its two upper corners ready to give it the required shove ; whilst Dick—ah ! Richard—sat by on his crimson steed to give the order.

Miss Lawrence got as tidily and handily into position as she could. She saw no occasion for dirtying herself needlessly even then, and laid the mortar, stepping aside as the stone fell, to avoid a splash, and making believe to adjust the big thing in its place after it was down.

‘Will that do ?’ she inquired, looking up with a bright twinkle in her dear old eye. ‘I do not see what else I can do.’

But before any one could answer, all were startled,

and Matilda Letitia thought fit to scream a little scream, at the sound of firearms exploded close beside them. The donkey looked most knowingly round (it did not start, good little beast!), and there stood Ralph with Sober-grey, solemnly and deliberately reloading two fowling-pieces. Four shots formed part of a royal salute, which could not, however, be finished because of tea. So the procession was re-formed, after a ringing cheer from the gentlemen and the boys, and proceeded downwards to the arbour for tea.

But they had not proceeded far, before their leader met with a sad disaster. The donkey—bother the donkey—was so teased by his trappings, which now coming down hill got more in his way, that he suddenly paused, and with no other warning threw up his heels, and deposited the future knight, flag, cocked hat and all, into the bushes. He then ran trotting down the hill, his legs looking as donkeys' do in such a position, as if they interlaced each other. Dick picked himself up, not a bit hurt, and scampered after his steed. But the donkey trotted away and away, faster and faster, quite down to the landing-place, and there, pushing his head into a corner, stood with his heels outside, in

a difficult position to get at. Dick was very angry with him, and rushed boldly in between his heels and the rock ; but donkey, of course, having half the length of his body in advance, turned again, imprisoning Dick, and so stood still.

However, Ralph now came to the rescue on the other side, and caught him. ‘ You had better go up, Master Richard ; I’ll tie him down here now. You won’t want him again ? ’

But Dick was determined to ride him up ; and springing on his back he forced him not only to go the way Dick chose, but to go as fast as he had come down. Nor did the boy dismount until he had reached the peak and had ridden the donkey down again. Ralph looked on as long as he could see, and approved highly, which was something for him, of Master Richard’s proceedings. The tea was laid out most tastefully by Mrs. Robins, in the arbour and around it, and was thoroughly enjoyed by the whole party. After it was over, the boys and Mr. Talbot went for a ramble, and the three elders sat enjoying a most pleasant chat under the trees on the green. Nor is there more to add of the day’s proceedings, than that the return voyage was equally successful.

Nor have I much more to add to my story. At the appointed time the Talbots returned home ; but this was not the last visit, by many, that they paid at The Refuge. They became most fast and valued friends to the old couple there. As for these two, their warm hospitality, and exceedingly kind behaviour to their nephews, brought its own reward in the interest and pleasure they thus added to a previously uneventful life ; and this reward they most richly deserved.

For the boys themselves : the castle was never finished ; it was too much of a job, and too entirely useless, ever to command perseverance enough to finish it. But it afforded great fun, even as it remained, for it was ‘supposed done,’ whilst the arbour and the garden did flourish in reality. Ralph affirmed that the castle was worth all the bother it had given Master Richard, if it taught him the truth of that motto. But this is not likely to be the only lesson Richard unconsciously gathered from it. Probably he learnt also the value of mutual assistance, and the folly of vaunts and dreams too wild to be realized ; nor could Edward’s and Tommy’s kindness have been quite forgotten. But probably Dick built many more such castles

in the air before these lessons were fully mastered. Yet when Colonel and Mrs. Lawrence returned after their five years' absence, they were, and with ample reason, fully satisfied with their three fine, good boys,—who did not, on their part, then find that the absence had been such an interminable period of woe as they had at first feared.

One little episode more, and I have told my tale.

On the evening of the Talbots' first departure, Mr. Lawrence sat with his sister by the open sitting-room window. The boys were out-of-doors, and their merry voices could be heard as they played at some little distance. The fragrance of the flowers, the hum of the bees, the song of the birds, combined to make the hour charming. The rays of a nearly setting sun rested on Miss Lawrence's tranquil, gentle face, when her brother laid his hand on her arm, and almost murmured the question: 'Sister, do you know *whose* son he is?'

She started, and the colour for a moment flushed in her cheeks. 'Yes, brother,' she replied in a tone as low. 'I was nearly sure of it, on the first day he came; but I did not know that they had changed their name for a property, until last week.'

'Sister!' exclaimed Mr. Lawrence again after a minute's pause—and now his voice faltered: 'do you repent?'

'No! brother—indeed no!' was her earnest answer.

And the aged brother and sister sat silently together, hand in hand, on that delicious evening, till it was too late to remain longer at the window; occupied it may be with thoughts of the past, but secure in each other's affection, and more one than it is given to many pairs in this world of ours to be.

And so we bid them farewell.



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